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OULITA

LONDON : PRINTED BY
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MOULITA THE SERF

A Tragedy

BY THE
AUTHOR OF 'FRIENDS IN COUNCIL'

STRAHAN & CO.
56, LUDGATE HILL, LONDON

1873

[*Second Edition*]

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Dramatis Personæ.

THE EMPEROR OF RUSSIA.

COUNT EDGAR VON STRAUBENHEIM.

BARON GRÜBNER, *Minister of Police.*

PRINCE LANSKOF, *a Boyard Noble.*

ERMOLAÏ, *Secretary to COUNT VON STRAUBENHEIM.*

VASILI ANDROVITCH, *Steward to PRINCE LANSKOF.*

MITCHKA, *Executioner in the Household of PRINCE LANSKOF.*

NICHOLAS POUGATCHOF, *always called the 'SMALL WISE MAN,'
a Dwarf in the Household of PRINCE LANSKOF.*

STÉPAN APOLLONOVITCH, *a Serf of COUNT VON STRAUBENHEIM'S.*

MARDARI KHAILOVITCH, *a Steward on one of the COUNT'S
estates.*

The Governor of a Russian Province.

THE PRINCESS MARIE ZEOZIA LANSKOF, *Daughter of PRINCE
LANSKOF.*

OULITA, *a Serf belonging to the PRINCE.*

Spies, Peasants, and Attendants.

Time, the beginning of the Nineteenth Century.

26 Aug 53 g. Foundation Turner = 1873 H 360 10 Feb 53

OULITA, THE SERF.



ACT I.

SCENE I.

Bureau of the Head Police at St. Petersburg.

BARON GRÜBNER *at a desk.*

BARON GRÜBNER.

So, then, it was the Count von Straubenheim—

Like a dull pedagogue, he must instruct

His Emperor in all the arts of empire.

The end, forsooth, of government—so says

The Count—is not to govern overmuch ;

To make men do with the least show of governing.

‘Passports ! a means of finding out—the innocent,

And plaguing them, a safe-guard to the guilty.’

Sagacious Count, who’d have the land o’errun

With dangerous, prying, scornful foreigners !
Each Czar, he told the Monarch, should evolve
Himself—‘evolve himself,’ the precious coxcomb !—
From trappings overgreat for poor humanity,
And multiply through millions made of freemen
The power (not to be wished for) he puts off
Himself—

Enter SPY.

SPY.

I’ve news, so please your Excellency :
The Emperor receives the Count again
At nine to-night.

BARON GRÜBNER.

’Twas from that Baroness
You learnt the news ?

SPY.

It was, my Lord.

BARON GRÜBNER.

Dear women !

What should we do without them ?

[Makes a gesture of dismissal to the

SPY. *Exit SPY.*

Far into

The distant future this wise man looked forward,
And saw a time, he told the Emperor,
When half the world would not employ itself
In worrying the other half. Great sage!
He meant that for a sneer at the Police;
And when good honest men would not sit down
At meat with titled spies—that means the Baroness;
Or with the men who pay them—that means me.
What would become, I ask, of Holy Russia
If such a rampant fool as this had influence,
And were by Princes listened to, though but
To pass the time? He must be crushed, or I—
‘The English are the models of the earth!’
He’ll rue the day he ever talked of England.
’Tis there we’ll send him.

(*Enter ERMOLAÏ.*)

How now, Ermolaï,
Hast any news? If so, you’re doubly welcome.

ERMOLAÏ.

News, Excellency? I’m ashamed—I’ve nothing—
I crave dismissal from this post. Set me
To watch the crows upon some heath, to tend
The sheep upon a breezy hill: I’d find

Some rumours in the breezes—with the Count
There's nothing to be done. I rust, my Lord.
He's ever at his books : I can't think why
You fear the man. Are scholars to be feared ?

BARON GRÜBNER.

When they can bring their misty theories
Straight to the ears of men in power—the highest—
Most dangerous are these same scholars—then
The man's unpurchasable—that's a danger.
I cannot like such men. What does he read ?

ERMOLAIÏ.

Theology.

BARON GRÜBNER.

Much might be made of that.
I tell, you, Sir, this man is mischievous
Beyond belief. Should he prevail, we fall,
And, with us, Russia.

ERMOLAIÏ.

That he cannot mean.
The Count is wildly patriotic.

BARON GRÜBNER.

Mean

Why, Ermolaiï, of all the high police

You are the shrewdest, and you talk about

{ Men's meaning—are not most men's acts in absolute
And clearest contradiction to their meanings?

He's to be married—

ERMOLAI.

That's a punishment,

And occupation too. What an abrupt

Resolve!

BARON GRÜBNER.

I've long resolved it, and the Emperor
Is of my mind. 'Tis done. On a great embassy
To England then he goes, in which I see
Some chance of ruin, and at least he will
Be far from ears that listen to his trash
With too much patience.

ERMOLAI.

And, meanwhile, my Lord,
Must I exhaust my time, and, what you're pleased
To call, my skill, in watching a mere scholar?
I'd rather hunt a butterfly.

BARON GRÜBNER.

{ The greatest gains are often least direct;

And we may frustrate more, good Ermolai,
By counterplotting 'gainst this moody scholar
Than tracking desperate men resolved on treason.
Besides, I'm wearied of conspirators :
They are a stupid race ; and, ostrich-like,
Beak in the sand and body full exposed,
They court destruction, giving little toil,
And pleasure almost none, to the ill-used huntsman.
At least to such a one as you. Adieu !
Let not a word escape your notice—'Twas
A heaven-born chance by which I palmed you on him,
One of ourselves, his trusted confidant,
His secretary ; it makes me young again
To think how we delude his solemn worship.
We, who improve such accidents, deserve them.
Let not a word, I say, escape your notice,
Scarcely a thought. These philanthropic fools
Are mostly open to the view.

[*Touches his breast. Exeunt.*

SCENE II.

*Library in COUNT VON STRAUBENHEIM'S house at
St. Petersburg.*

COUNT *sitting at a table : he puts down his book.*

COUNT.

One reads, and reads, and reads : one seldom gets
Right into the heart of things—there's so much floss
And fluff; and few can tell what they do know.

Long histories : weary biographies :

They only teach us what I partly guessed

Before—that men were most times miserable,

And simple thoroughly, wasting their souls

In plaguing other men, and seldom living

What I call life—an ugly dream it is ;

And yet, with all my faculty for sarcasm,

I must confess that men, the worst of men,

This scoundrel horde of conquerors, for instance,

[*Closes the book.*

Have something very lovable about them.

The deeper that one goes, the more one's pity

Falls like a gentle snow upon the plain

Flooded with blood, and strewn with foolish carnage,

Leaving the outlines beautiful, and just
Concealing what 'twere better never had
Been done—concealing only, not erasing :
'Tis a mixed brood.—But that reminds me.

[*Rings a bell.*]

COUNT (*to the servant who enters*).

Has Ermolaï returned ?

SERVANT.

He has, my Lord.

COUNT.

Then send him hither.

[*Exit SERVANT.*]

Now this dishonest, faithful, loving creature—

Why, what a tangled thing his mind must be.

A spy—a friend—a most affectionate snake—

He little dreams that I know all about him ;

Could guess where he has been to-day : on my

Affairs he said—and so it was.

(*Enter ERMOLAÏ.*)

Well, Ermolaï,

You've prospered in your business, as I trust :

Nay, tell it not, for I have much to impart

That you must know, that needs your instant care.

You once were married—do not start—it is

A state of great felicity, they tell me,

And one, that, if felicitous or not,
Must be gone through by men of my condition.
My friends demand it, and the Czar is pleased
To say the Empire does.—There is a place
Of highest trust, but more of that anon—
Then they are kind enough to urge, ‘Time presses,
You are not what you were, Sir Count; long studies
Make furrows here and there:’ one’s friends are
 privileged
To say these pleasant things,—what else would be
The good of friendship? For my private pleasure
I could remain unmarried and unplaced
In high estate; but to preserve one’s quietude
It needs that one should travel in the ruts
That form the ordinary road, for else
The wheels stick fast. There’s this in high estate,
One can be much alone. You don’t seem pleased:
The few I have informed put on an air
Of great delight.

ERMOLAÏ.

The lady?

COUNT.

Why, she’s beautiful,
Witty; moreover, it is somewhat flattering

To find that, though there are these odious furrows,
One's not displeasing to the girl. Ambition
Her father's choice directs : (*aside*) she may do worse,
Poor thing,—(*aloud*) Prince Lanskof's daughter.

ERMOLAI.

I've heard a saying
Of some sagacious world-versed man,—that marriage
Must be pronounced a thing so hazardous,
The odds so much against one, that it were
As if a man should dip his hand within
A bag of snakes, where one eel lies concealed ;
And mostly he draws back his injured hand
Without the innocent eel.

COUNT.

Some bitter man
Said this, who had transformed his gentle eel
Into a snake, an easy transformation—
And then he railed at women.

ERMOLAI.

Ah, my Lord !

COUNT.

That was a potent sigh. Now, Ermolai,
I have a distant notion of what love

Might be. I know the dreams about the thing.
That there is one whose every look and word
Is fascination ; graceful as the clouds ;
Bright as the morn, and tender as the eve,—
Whose lightest gesture, as she moves across
The room, seems like a well-known melody,—
Whose presence you fly from sometimes to think,
Alone and undisturbed, upon her loveliness,—
Whose mirth, reined in by subtle sympathy,
Is not in discord with your finest sense,
But fitly gleams upon this serious world,
As lambent summer meteors bring to light
The outlines of great buildings, beautifully,—
And whom you need not talk to much, for that's
The touchstone,—to whom you've nothing to explain,
Because she always thinks too well of you ;—
Who consecrates whate'er by chance she touches
To the fond fool who dwells beneath her windows,
On winter nights, and—catches cold, poor fellow.
I know all that, I'm not unread in fiction,
But where for me is this dear paragon ?
One in the world—in Tartary, mayhap.

ERMOLAI.

The singing girl at Moscow, my good Lord ?
You've not forgotten her : Oulita ?

COUNT.

Forgotten ! No.

Her pretty ways to that old crab, her master,
Her winning words oft overheard by me,
When, as a pupil, in disguise, I gained
Approach, are but too oft, too fondly thought of.
The Czar sent opportunely for me, Ermolai :
Pray heaven we meet her not again. She was
Prince Lanskof's serf—
We'll not go deeper into these things.—Then,
Besides the marriage, as that does not seem
To please you much, there is the weighty charge
Of a great embassy—the Czar dwells much
On that—to England ; now you love a life
Of travel and of movement : you'll come with me ?

ERMOLAI.

How many fools I've known set out upon
Their travels, and return—not much less foolish.

COUNT.

How petulant you are to-day, my friend.
His Excellency's trusted secretary
Will be looked up to, and caressed, in England ;
Bright eyes will smile on him. Perhaps, my
Ermolai,

You'll make another marriage—catch the eel
This time.

ERMOLAI.

No; Heaven forbid :—but please Your
Excellency—

Am I to call you so?

COUNT.

No; not at present.

Prepare to go with me to Lanskof's château.
See that the retinue is sumptuous, man;
Let gold and broidery blazon forth devotion,
Or, as may sometimes happen, serve to hide
The want of it. Use all your skill in pageantry.

[*Exit* ERMOLAI.

Now this

Is most transparent—well he knows this marriage—
The embassy, the whole device is Grübner's,
To ruin me. Why, when I saved this Ermolai,
And he lay fainting on the shore, close to
His heart there was a picture of a girl,
Fair-haired — his wife, who died—and the first
thought

The man had was for that; besides he loves
Intrigue, he'd revel in diplomacy.

But then he fears the worst for me.—I'll dupe
This Grübner—fight him with his own poor weapons.
I'll wed the Princess ; strive to win her love,
And make her not unhappy ; coldly pluck
That other fancy from this foolish heart,
(Our private griefs prove often buttresses
To public greatness) ;—then accept the embassy,—
Escape clear out of it, if watchfulness
Can save me ;—perhaps return more powerful,
And thwart this wretched trickster—for the Czar
Means well by me. Could I break through this net
Of spy-work, Russia then would owe me something :
A greater patriot I might be than those
Who loudly bawl about their country's greatness,
And flatter her worst faults : 'tis perilous,
But I will try what can be done—at least,
Life will not be more dull than it is now
With me.

[*Exit the Count.*]

SCENE III.

Hall in PRINCE LANSKOF'S Château.

Enter Men-servants, who commence trying on new liveries—Dancing-girls, who practise their steps. Enter 'SMALL WISE MAN' and VASILI ANDROVITCH.

DIMITRI.

Master Vasili, this coat will never do for me : it was meant for that hogshead of ale, Nicholas.

NICHOLAS.

Here's a thing for a whipping-post : it would do for Dimitri, though, if it is not too big. It's a noble covering for a jack-snipe.

VASILI.

Settle it amongst yourselves ; if you are not all ready in time you'll have a coating of horse-whip that you won't like.

THIRD SERVANT.

When does the Count come, Master Vasili ? Tell us that.

VASILI.

In three hours, at the furthest, he'll be here.
Bustle, bustle ! [Exit VASIL.

SMALL WISE MAN (*practising his steps and
mimicking the dancers*).

You tawdry jackasses, look at me ; do you think anybody will look at you ? Te-to-tum : Te-to-tum (*pirouettes*) : the last new thing from Paris ; and downright clever it would be if a cow did it ; but it is not the very highest effort for a human being. Where's the chalk for my shoes ? You girls think that nobody will look at anybody but you. Where's the chalk, I say ?

(*Enter PRINCESS MARIE, speaking to OULITA*).

PRINCESS.

You must : you shall. What airs ! We're far too
grand

To join in dances with the other girls.

Our little saintly prude, Oulita, scorns

Such vulgar pastimes. Oh, these tiresome tears !

I hate them as the men do ;—like the men

I yield to them. There, there, it shall not dance,
then.

OULITA.

Thanks, dearest madam. May I go?

[*The PRINCESS gives a nod of assent.*

(*Enter PRINCE LANSKOF.*)

PRINCE.

Why, nothing's ready, nothing. Where, I say,
Where are the singing knaves? Go see, go see.

[*Exeunt some servants.*

SMALL WISE MAN.

Oh! the happy peasants are so uncomfortable, my little father, in their happy new clothes, that they put off the squeezing themselves into them to the last moment. It's a nice thing a new shoe, now; and not so very unlike a marriage, my little mother.

PRINCE.

Sirrah, restrain your jests to-day. The occasion
Is one of no light import for our house.

Marie, too soon you cannot urge the Count
Upon that point of precedence I named.

In foreign Courts 'tis everything, this precedence.
What an ambassadress she'll make! Just walk

Across the hall. I like to fancy you
At England's Court.

PRINCESS.

The world will say, dear father,
Your love for me impairs your wisdom.

SMALL WISE MAN.

Shall I walk across the hall, my little father? If
I go to England, everybody shall turn round to look
at me.

[*Exit* SMALL WISE MAN, *walking pompously. The PRINCE shakes his fist at him.*]

PRINCESS.

Father, I'll go and dress.

PRINCE.

Spare no magnificence.

[*Exit* PRINCESS.]

Away, my men, away: in two hours' time
You'll all be marshalled here.

[*Exeunt servants, &c.*]

E'en to the Czar
Must reach the news of our great entertainment,

Our homage to his potent favourite.
For 'tis the Czar's own thought, this happy marriage.
He ever loved our house.

[*Exit the PRINCE.*]

SCENE IV.

A Wood near PRINCE LANSKOF'S Castle.

Enter COUNT, ERMOLAÏ, and Attendants.

COUNT.

Yes, Ermolaï, I've often hunted here—
Go, you, with all the horses and the men
Along that avenue. I will, alone,
Pass through the wood.

ERMOLAÏ.

The Prince loves state, my Lord.

COUNT.

He does: I will rejoin you; but now go.

[*Exeunt ERMOLAÏ and Attendants.*]

I ever loved a wood; and here I've mused,

Pressing with lightest footfall the crisp leaves,
In boyhood's days, when life seemed infinite,
And every fitful sound a song of joy.
Great is the sea, but tedious ; rich the sun,
But one gets tired of him too ; joyous the wind,
But boisterous and intrusive ;—while, the wood
Divides the sun, and air, and sky ; and, like
A perfect woman, naught too much revealed,
Nor aught too much concealing.—

OULITA *sings*.

*The moon to the earth,
To the shore the sea,
The stork to her berth,
In the old roof tree,
Comes back, comes back ;
And so will my lover to me,
To me—
And so will my lover to me.*

COUNT (*advancing, and discovering OULITA*).

Sweet words ! but 'tis a pity they're not true.

OULITA.

How, Sir, not true ?

COUNT.

He will not come again.

OULITA.

In the old ballad he said he would not come ;
And, therefore, being a man, I think he will come.

COUNT.

In trifling things men sometimes are forgetful.

OULITA.

Yes, I admit that women's love for men
Is but a light affair indeed to them,
And lighter still their own fond protestations—
The little filmy bubbles, rainbow-hued,
That anxious children watch : that mostly break
Just as they, trembling, touch the ground—men's

VOWS

It was that we were speaking of as trifles ?
Still 'tis in trifling things that truth is seen :
So say the moralists ;—most of them men,
Who have, no doubt, the absolute test of practice
For all they preach.

COUNT (*aside*).

The maiden has the best
Of this encounter. Methinks I'll take to flight.

A sorry ending, though, for one who's deemed
A wit in Petersburg and Moscow.

OULITA.

You, Sir, are one of the Count's retinue?
Will the Count come to-day?

COUNT.

He came with us.
But what brought you here, maiden? Can they
spare
Such beauty in the muster to receive him?

OULITA.

Good Lord, what fools we women must be deemed,
When the first word you deign to address us with,
Is some obsequious compliment—a veteran
Exhausted by long service in the wars—
About our beauty; why, we've all heard that
Before.

COUNT.

Not the less welcome, perhaps, on that account.
But listen now, fair maid: it has been said
By some adventurous thinker—a most bold,
Poetic man, who threw out strange ideas,

I' the hope that thus discoveries might be made—
That women are a little curious. He
Said it ; not I. Building myself upon
His thought, I offer you a fair exchange.
You shall disclose to me why you came hither,
And what have been your thoughts. I will tell you
What sort of man the Count is ; what will be
His dress the marriage day ; what gems he brings.
I am his foster-brother.

OULITA.

Curiosity

I see does not belong to men. Your thoughts,
Fair Sir, if you will first reveal, and then,
As a mere make-weight—not that I care to know—
Declare the ways and manners of the Count,
I may, in turn, what brought me to the wood,
And what have been my thoughts, disclose.

COUNT.

The Count is of my height, and, some men say,
Resembles me. His dress is rich and slovenly ;
His mind perhaps the same. When he is angry,
You will not know it. Doubtless he loves your
mistress.

Rubies and diamonds glistening, intertwined
In serpent forms—

OULITA.

Spare us the jewels, Sir,
The gifts for great princesses do not much
Concern us serfs : your own thoughts now—

COUNT.

Poor trash—

Mere melancholy thoughts, fit for a servitor :
How this tree here hemmed in its puny neighbour,
Drinking the air and light from it ; how that,
The vagrant branches into shapes grotesque
Constrained, insisted yet on being beautiful,
And like a homely girl with one charm only,
Took care to make that charm discernable.

OULITA.

We furnish you with many thoughts, I see.
(*Aside*) I recognise this man. The same I'm sure
Who followed me about in Moscow.

COUNT.

And ruin everywhere—ruin and growth—
I saw.
Then, rustling, came a creature of the wood,

And perched upon a log, and neither ate,
Nor played, but seemed in meditation lost.
I wondered what it thought of—think it did ;—
My ears were gladdened by a song, and then
My eyes by seeing you. And now, young maiden,
For your bright thoughts, and why you hither came.

OULITA.

That I might talk a little to myself,
And be alone, I came. I saw a fawn
Tormented by a gadfly, and I thought :
Is life's plan cruel everywhere—the scourge
Throughout the world ? If men were kind to one
Another, and if women—harder task—
Were kind to women, would the world be still
Distraught and miserable ? Thus I let
My simple thoughts run on ; and then I heard
A footstep ; quickly turned, and saw—your worship.
I did not think of meeting such a questioner,
And answering like a child.

COUNT.

You serve the Princess ?

OULITA.

I am her reader, Sir.

COUNT.

Hence the philosophy.

I will enlarge upon your pleasant text ;
With still more cheering strains exalt the theme
Of human nature. What a thing is man :
He plans and toils, and much result comes from it,
But just the opposite of what he meant.
With large expense of power and great dexterity
He does the thing he would not ; hardly knows
Whether to fold his hands and let the flood
Of ill move in upon him, or to advance
And make by his good speed a swifter ruin.
Much he foresees—enough to terrify,
If not to guide ;—and then a darker passage.
He loves, or hates : madness on either side—
Too comical to pity, and too dread
A thing wholly to laugh at : such is man.
You are displeased with my poor thoughts.

OULITA.

No more, Sir ;

Pray you, no more. The lightest thing that breathes
Might make the same complaint : that it was
bounded—

Lived but a day—that other creatures quelled it—

That it was not the universe. The fly
Upon that leaf might make a moan to reach
The stars.

COUNT.

And be a foolish, querulous fly,
For all its bravery of words. By all
That's philosophic, you speak well, fair girl,
And are the prettiest doctor of theology
hat e'er——

*(Enter MITCHKA, who watches them from
behind a tree).*

OULITA.

Pardon me, Sir, I must return.

COUNT.

And would prefer to walk without your train
Of listening scholars, or e'en one of them.
Well, girl, good-bye. We may resume, perhaps,
Our lectures on philosophy.

OULITA.

No, no ;

I have already been too bold, Sir.

[*Exit.*

COUNT.

If this

Were told in Moscow now, who would believe it?

Women are inexhaustible. The common man

Will think he understands them all, when he

Has mastered one or two. But that's the world's

Chief wonder—such at least it always seemed

To me,—the difference of human beings,

Each from the rest. No more of this. To use

Philosophy, and not to talk about it—

The cursed chance that brought her in my way!

The very girl I had resolved to shun.

She recognized me not. This odious marriage,

Heavily it weighs upon me. How I shocked her

By talking treason 'gainst poor human nature.

They have a finer sense than we of right;

And living wholly in the present time,

Enjoying that, as only women do,

They feel the beauty of the world, and shrink

At our cold scepticism. I will not talk

To her in that mad way again.

[*Exit the COUNT.*

SCENE V.

Hall in PRINCE LANSKOF'S Castle. Enter the
'SMALL WISE MAN,' rolling a barrel.

SMALL WISE MAN.

There, Sir, stand still, and let me get up upon you. I've not had a mouthful of Christian talk the whole day long. One must do something odd, or something wicked, to be noticed. It is better now to sit on a barrel and dangle one's legs than to be a great conqueror and kill a hundred thousand men—just to be talked to and talked of. Knaves, knaves, knaves: come hither, come hither. (*Kicks the tub.*)

[*Enter several servants.*]

FIRST SERVANT.

What a devil's tattoo little Wisey is kicking up there!

SMALL WISE MAN.

Such news, such news, such news, such news!

(*The servants gather round him, crying out,*
'Tell us!')

SMALL WISE MAN.

The illustrious Count von Straubenheim, who, with our permission, is about to marry into our family,

intends to give to every member of the household—something which shall be good for him : great guerdon, liberal largesse. For you Melchior, Nicholas, and Petrovitch (*pointing out three fat men*), he intends to ask for a week's fast, and three weeks' out-of-door's work in the woods—(*the others laugh*). For you, Theodore, a sound scourging at the hands of gentle Mitchka, that you may know how to manage your horses better, and what are the feelings of an animal when it is whipped—(*the others laugh*). For you, Dimitri, our illustrious son-in-law has thought deeply, and intends to ask the Prince to have your wife brought home from his other estate, because you always lived so happily together.

[*Servants laugh, and disperse.*]

(*Enter the PRINCE, PRINCESS, and Attendants. Musicians go into the gallery. Flourish of trumpets. Enter COUNT, ERMOLAÏ, and Attendants.*)

CHORAL SONG.

*She is the comely, kindly snow,**

That hides the earth from the storms that blow,

* A winter without snow is very fatal in Russia.

*And lets the wee things live the cruel winter
thro'—*

*Our dear Princess Barina.**

He is the widely-spreading plain, ? plane
That shelters us from the sun and rain,
While we dance till pleasant twilight comes
again—

The sire of our Barina.

PRINCE.

Count, you are welcome. Marie thought you tarried.
If any dial moved as fast as maids
Sometimes would have it go, wild work the sun
Would make of harvests. 'Twas, no doubt, the Czar
Detained you. Any news at Court ?

COUNT.

Why, somebody
Hates somebody else, and would fain climb up
To take his place. That's true. I'm not so sure
Who somebody is ; but the news is good
Court news.

* Barina is the Russian name for the mistress of serfs.

PRINCE.

You have not lost your pleasant wit
In our Bœotian plains.

COUNT.

Italian rather.

Such strains as greeted me can scarce belong
To our poor northern lips.

PRINCE.

When you have heard
A songstress in my daughter's train—a girl
Returned from her apprenticeship in Moscow,—
Native on this estate, your connoisseurship
Will own we rival Petersburg or Paris :
We poor provincials !

COUNT.

Ah ! there spoke the magnate
Who lives on his own land, and heartily
Believes in the peculiar tastes and virtues,
Quite incommunicable, of the quass,
The grain, the deer, on his estate (*aside*). The
same,
By Heaven ! the fair philosopher !

PRINCE.

A great advancement, and a step to honour,
This embassy to England, Count.

COUNT.

I could dispense——

SMALL WISE MAN.

Nephew-in-law, come hither. We wish to know
whether you are worthy of entering into our family.

PRINCE (*aside to the Count*).

The cleverest dwarf in Russia. The Empress says
He is a priceless treasure.

SMALL WISE MAN.

Middle-aged young man, has your education been
attended to? Should things begin at their begin-
nings?

COUNT.

Not always.

SMALL WISE MAN.

Does A come before B, and B before C, in the
Alphabet?

D

COUNT.

They used to do so. What is my little Diogenes driving at?

SMALL WISE MAN.

Are there any swine in your country?

COUNT.

Yes, a few.

SMALL WISE MAN.

Have you ever driven seven of them to market?

COUNT.

No, that is a part of my education which has been unaccountably neglected.

SMALL WISE MAN.

Ho, ho, ho! A foolish son-in-law, an empty son-in-law, a mad son-in-law! Knows that A comes before B, and B before C; hasn't learnt to make seven pigs go the same way, and thinks he can manage one woman! Ho, ho, ho! A foolish son-in-law, an ignorant son-in-law! Send him to market, uncle. I will go with him myself, and we will make a beginning of his education.

COUNT.

A small wise man, indeed! Art married, dwarf, Thyself?

SMALL WISE MAN.

No, no; but I've seen a boy take a wasps' nest, and so I found out that wasps could sting; but I was not stung myself. I kept on the other side of the hedge, and peeped through, encouraging the boy.

COUNT.

We will drive pigs together, small wise man.
And here's some pay beforehand.

SMALL WISE MAN.

There are hopes of this youth's education. He does know sometimes that B comes before C, though he doesn't know that A comes before B. Would marry a little Princess (B), is going as Ambassador to England (C), and doesn't know how to drive seven pigs to market (A)! Ho, ho, ho! a pretty son-in-law, a sensible son-in-law, a well-instructed son-in-law! Smooth your brow, uncle; I'll take the elderly lad in hand.

PRINCE.

There's no use answering, Count; the little body
Will talk for fifty.

[COUNT and PRINCE retire up the stage
to a banquet.]

SMALL WISE MAN.

A noble presence, and a thoughtful eye,
But sad. I've given him money's worth for money,
Did he but know it. Very hard to drive
Is that Princess, harder than any herd
Of swine.

(Enter OULITA.)

The pretty pet, the warbling pet, the pet that must
warble, as the small wise man must talk, when it's
bid. Give me your hand, pet. (*Aside*) (She is not
afraid of me, like the rest). (*Aloud*) I see in this
hand such things—how the golden wires of their
cages should spoil the voices of sweet singing-birds.
I like you, Oulita. A word in your ear. The small
wise man says, Be not too prodigal of gifts. The
horse and the dog are better cared for, as they are
more useful in the hunt; but the serf makes the
chain heavier by any excellence. Study to get free,

girl—free, free, free, free. The oracle says nothing more.

OULITA.

Thanks, oracle, my deepest, truest thanks.

(*Aside*)—You touch a chord unwittingly, that vibrates

Always in this poor bosom, never more

Than since I left the wood this afternoon.

The Count must be a man of mark, if he

Resembles that strange man, his foster-brother.

Most happy Princess!

[*Exit* OULITA.

(VASILI ANDROVITCH and MITCHKA the executioner
come forward.)

VASILI.

'Tis a large lump, three thousand roubles. A man might buy his freedom with it. Not a rouble less shall be in the sum I pay you down the day she's mine. Watch her; watch every one. They all fear you. Make them your spies. I hate these new comers. Look to them. Three thousand roubles! Ah! if we could but catch her tripping in some offence—some show of impertinence that would make the Princess give her up.

[*Exit* VASILI ANDROVITCH.

MITCHKA.

Poor lovesick fool ! she loathes him, as I loathe her. The dainty puss must shudder when she first saw me, and always passes with a downcast eye, as if I were something too hideous to look at. She must intercede, too, for the young Polish boy that laughed at me. Ah, dainty mistress ! the time may come— (*He strikes a blow in the air*). But there is so little going on here. Our old fool of a master talks, instead of letting me strike ! 'Tis an ill-regulated household ; and there is too much laughter everywhere. I should like to serve a master who hated giggling as much as I do.

[*Exit* MITCHKA.]

SMALL WISE MAN.

I could not hear much, but they are two scoundrels, and they talked of roubles, and a woman. Some one is to be made more miserable, which is needless in this world, to my thinking. Come, tub, roll out, you have done your duty.

[*Exit* SMALL WISE MAN, *rolling the tub before him.*]

The COUNT *gets up from banquet, and takes*

ERMOLAÏ *aside.*

COUNT.

My trusty Ermolai, use all your wits
For me this night. Amuse the Prince and Princess :
Show her the jewels, him the plans of our
New chateau. Say that I would mingle with
The crowd, and hear their praises.

(The COUNT walks about in the crowd for a few minutes, and speaks aside to the PRINCESS. Afterwards the PRINCE and the PRINCESS leave the hall, followed by ERMOLAI, and the dancing commences. Enter OULITA and other maidens.)

COUNT.

Ah, fair philosopher, you here to-night !
Is the great problem thus resolved—life's problem,—
And in the mazy movements of the dance
Comes there an arch-intelligence which solves
All human riddles, making beautiful
The world, and clear the path before your eyes ?
For something of the sort 'tis music does
With me, explaining most things ; perhaps with you
The measured pastime of those merry feet
Is full of grave instruction—shall we try it,
And take our place ?

OULITA.

No, Sir, methinks too suddenly—

COUNT.

I know—we are too free, too bold. Is it
Not so, Oulita? You see, I've learnt your name.
But time, girl, time in this most flurried world
Flits speedily. If there be any sympathy
Between two souls, [ah! might I dare to think
There is, or ever could be, sympathy
'Tween you and me,] there's hardly time to show it.
Though scared you look, yet not so angry, dear one,
As my presumption warrants. Come apart.
I serve a powerful lord, and have much power
With him—too much, alas! (*Aside*) One is too
powerful
With one's own self. (*Aloud*) The time may come,
Oulita,
You'll need some service. Take this ring.

OULITA.

Good Sir

The maiden must indeed be over simple
Who readily takes gifts from strangers. Why,
The fishes swallow not the hook without
It's cruel covering.

COUNT.

Look in my face, Oulita—

Steadfastly : craft you see, and, perhaps some
fierceness ;

But not the kind of craft that would deceive
A trusting girl. The ring is but a token
To send to me when any danger threatens :
And danger must surround a serf who's beautiful.
Come, will you frankly take it ?

OULITA.

I will ; you frighten me,
But I will trust you.

COUNT.

Like you this state of yours—
This waiting-woman, artist, serf-life ?

OULITA.

Oh, Sir !

You've sounded in the depths of this poor heart :
You see that it is freedom that I crave—
The basest, meanest, homeliest kind of freedom.
If you have power, Sir, and give me freedom,
My whole life long shall be one duty-task,
My freedom's cost to reimburse. But, no—
I am too costly.

COUNT.

Girl, you shall be free !
Here is my hand upon't. What makes you tremble ?

OULITA.

A face that passed—Mitchka, the executioner.

COUNT.

Farewell ! My master will be waiting for me.
Again, farewell ! [Exit COUNT.]

OULITA.

It is not maidenly,
But I was spell-bound. Full of power
He seems, and looks with such authority,
The Czar himself could not but listen to him ;
And I, a poor bewildered girl, entranced
By look and word, felt like the doomèd reptile
That waits the serpent's spring, gazing on two
Bright lustrous eyes, enchanted, yet dismayed.
Ah ! but it was a sweet terror. [Exit OULITA.]

CHORAL SONG OF PEASANTS.

*Without a smile, without a song,
In silence all the six days long,
The foul fiends work, a gloomy throng,*

*Through the fast, and through the feast,
And slave twice as much on a Sunday.*

*With a merry smile, a jovial song,
Chattering all the six days long,
The Russians work, a happy throng.*

*Keep the fast and keep the feast,
And rest from Saturday to Monday.*

[Exeunt omnes.

(Enter the COUNT and ERMOLAÏ.)

COUNT.

How many horses have we, Ermolaï ?

ERMOLAÏ.

Twenty, I think, my Lord ; but—

COUNT.

Not enough

How many roubles ?

ERMOLAÏ.

Twenty thousand.

COUNT.

Not enough.

Is black St. George here—the Arabian horse
A child can guide?—once ridden by a girl.

ERMOLAIÏ.

It is, my Lord. We thought the bride might like—

COUNT.

Yes, yes, the bride. We may have other uses,
Is Stépan here—the serf that aped so cleverly
A merchant at our Christmas follies?

ERMOLAIÏ.

No,

My Lord.

COUNT.

And you have never loved—not once?

ERMOLAIÏ.

I am not sure of that, my Lord.

COUNT.

Not sure?

Nor I. But surely I will keep my promise.
Now look you, ErmolaiÏ. This eve is fraught
With weightiest import, both to you and me.
Come hither, Sir, and look me in the face:
Summon whate'er sincerity is left in you,

And answer, as you'd solemn answer give
At that dread final time when naught remains
For men but truth—a fatal hour for spies.
Will you be mine, instead of Grübner's slave ?

ERMOLAIÏ (*starting back*).

You knew, then, that I was a spy of Grübner's,
Set close about you, watching all your ways,
Reporting every careless word ?—not that
I did report, but still was bound to do it.—
You knew all this, my Lord, and yet you saved me !
And but for you I might have died as a dog,
When from the Neva's flood you rescued me !
You knew all this ?

COUNT.

Of course I did. Did you
Find much to carry to your other master ?
A barren tale sometimes, good Ermolaiï.
Pooh, man ! I have no time for jest or irony.
I knew you were a spy : I knew you loved me :
I rescued you. 'Twas then I learnt your worth,
Seeing remorseful anguish in your soul.
But gratitude must ever be made light ;
And if you would have men to love you, Ermolaiï,

E'en to yourself must be unknown your benefits,
Or quite, at least, forgotten. Are you mine,
Or Grübner's? Speak!

ERMOLAÏ.

I'm wholly yours, my Lord ;
Now and for ever. Might I crave forgiveness—

[*Kneels.*]

COUNT.

No, no, I have no mind for sentiment :
I trust you wholly ; hence your fortunes are
My care. Now listen, and smile not. I love,
Or something very like it. Her I love
Not for the first time I have seen to-day :
The first time, though, was fatal. Nay, smile not !
The lightning does not take a month to strike ;
And story-books I always jeered at mightily
Are right. The man is smitten down at once—
We mock the word, but 'tis a good word, smitten.
'Twas fate that walked before me in that wood.
I met the singing-girl, my loved Oulita ;
Yes, mine.
She's still a serf, but I have sworn
To set her free. Omit all counsel, friend ;
I do not need a counsellor. Free shall

She be. Now, then, the means? This foolish prince,
Who has the best of everything—the best horse,
The wittiest dwarf, the most astounding chateau,
And—here he lies not—the most rare of singers,
Oulita,—must be made to sell this treasure.—
Stépan not with us?

ERMOLAIÏ.

No, my Lord.

COUNT.

Adroit

As you, friend, justly are esteemed by Grübner,
You see at once my drift. Stépan, disguised,
Must buy her.

ERMOLAIÏ.

This will fail, my Lord.

COUNT.

It will,

I think. But we must try it. 'Tis but one
Of many plans I have already mastered.
You look amazed. I know your thoughts. This
student,
'Entirely given to niceties of learning,'
(As you were good enough to tell the Baron—

You see we have our counter-spies), so he
Can plot, and plan, and scheme with the best of you.
But this is wandering—every moment's precious.
We hunt—a foolish solemn hunt—far off
To-morrow, and it lasts for several days.
This very hour let messengers set out
To my estates for money, horses, men.
You will remain. The hunt shall linger out
To its full length. Meanwhile, there must not be
A single room, or hall, or corridor,
That you must not set down with nicest certitude.
You wish to study this fine building thoroughly.
Where lodge our men? Are they together?

ERMOLAÏ.

Yes:

In the right wing, my Lord, and all together.
They are alone. 'Tis separate from the house
By a long corridor.

COUNT (*muses*).

A simulated death—but, no! I fear
To play with dread similitudes of that kind.
(*Whispering*)—Well, if need be, we'll raise some great
alarm

ERMOLAÏ.

My Lord!

COUNT.

And in the tumult bear her off.—Why, men
Have perilled their immortal souls for honour ;
For wider lordship ; oftentimes for vanity ;
Why not for love ? By Heaven, she shall be saved !
One messenger for Stépan and his mummings,
One to Birgholt for sixty thousand roubles,
One for my Ukraine horses. Con the list
Of all my vassals. From my three estates
Send for the trustiest men—say seven from each.
We wish to do the Prince the greatest honour
By a grand retinue. You here remain,
All eyes, all ears, no tongue. Watch the executioner,
That hideous Mitchka, for some crime he must
Have done ; I see it in the villain's face.
Find out that crime. Spare neither gold, my friend,
Nor promises. Here are three signatures
In blank. Now go, 'tis nearly midnight.

[*Exit* ERMOLAÏ.

I am a knave, a double-dealing scoundrel,
To woo one girl the while I love another,
For I do love her—

What should I say of any other man ?

(But then our own misdeeds are quite peculiar ;

White at the edges, shading into darkness,
Not wholly black like other men's enormities.
Theirs are the thunder-clouds ; ours but the streaks
Across the setting sun.—No, no ! I'm not
A fool like that. I know full well 'tis base,
Supremely base ; natheless it shall be done.
If there were time, some other course we might
Devise ; but that's what scoundrels always say—
If there were time, they would replace, repay ;
In Virtue's silvery path they would walk leisurely.
I am not duped by that. Seeing it all,
Foreseeing all the misery, the mischief,
I'll do 't, I say, and take the guilt upon me.
She shall be free.

[*The curtain drops.*]

ACT II.

SCENE I.

Hall in the Prince Lanskoj's Castle. Enter the SMALL WISE MAN in a hunting costume, with a gun. Afterwards the PRINCESS MARIE.

PRINCESS.

Well, small Wisey, and what are you wandering about there for in that outlandish fashion ?

SMALL WISE MAN.

My little mother,* I am out on a hunting excursion. Here is the gun ; don't be afraid—I never put

* 'The Russian people must have a father or mother in all the relations of life ; if there is no real father, one may be chosen in the family—a brother, an uncle, even a perfect stranger : this is the first social link. . . . The people on an estate regard their landlord as father, and address him, even if only a boy, as *Batiushka* (Little Father) ; the people cling to the Czar with the strongest attachment, addressing him likewise as *Batiushka*.'—*The Russian Empire*. By BARON VON HAXTHAUSEN. Vol. i, cap. xiii. p. 397.

any powder in it, my little mother. It's not a real gun. But here are some real bread and cheese, and some true quass. Eating and drinking are the best part of hunting, and the only part which a wise man will have anything to do with. Have a bit, my little mother. Ah! I see you have not a sportman's appetite. My brother sportsmen come home to-day; I am expecting them. Hark you, my little mother; come nearer, and I'll whisper something in your ear. You will not be so simple as to let the Prince sell your pretty singing-bird?

PRINCESS.

Oulita! What do you mean, Wisey? Has my father any intention of selling Oulita?

SMALL WISE MAN.

No intention; but there came last night from Moscow an ugly, bearded vagabond of a merchant—a Jew, I'll swear; and this rascally, peddling, haggling vagabond wants to buy our Oulita, to bring her out in some squalling part for the Emperor's fête day; and he says that it will please the Czar, and gain great renown for the Prince; and the wretch rattles his roubles, and seems as confident as if he could buy

as all up. I assure you, my little mother, I've been obliged to conceal my own small talents in the singing way ever since the villain made his appearance. They'll want to engage me next.

PRINCESS.

But my father will never sell Oulita ; he is too proud of her. Besides, I love her as if she were my sister. She is the wisest little woman, as you are the wisest little man, in the whole province.

SMALL WISE MAN.

Your father is very rich ; and I never knew a very rich man who didn't want a little more money, didn't say he was pinched somewhere—pinched, that is their word—and didn't like to make a good bargain.

PRINCESS.

What is to be done, Wisey ? You know that you have the longest head of any of us, and only conceal your wit by your wild fancy. I understand you.

SMALL WISE MAN.

Imprimis, my little mother, you must not go off into one of your huge passions ; for there be those

who whisper to the Prince that he is managed by your tempests, and there are men who will do any silly thing rather than have it said that they are managed. *Secundo*, Oulita must not have a cold—the cross cold of great singers—but she must sing badly; and (*whispering*)—make her dress ill. Tell her to be vulgar, and awkward, and dowdy. But hark! they are coming home. Get me down that boar's head, Quick, quick! Now run to Oulita, and prepare her. [Exit PRINCESS.

[*Flourish of hunting-horns. Enter hunting attendants in procession, carrying dead deer; afterwards the PRINCE and the COUNT.*

SMALL WISE MAN.

Welcome, brother sportsmen! Here, boys, take my gun, and here's the boar's head, the boar I slew last night. You may hang it up in our hall as a trophy. And you, my little father, you, too, have had good sport. And you, Sir Count? Some food? Our great fatigues make us less dainty.

(*Enter an Attendant*).

ATTENDANT.

There is a merchant here, your Excellency, who

begs for an audience; says his business is most urgent; has come from Moscow without stopping, your Excellency. It is something about the Emperor's fête day.

PRINCE.

You see, Count, they cannot do without us Boyards, upon their great occasions. Admit him instantly.

[*Enter STÉPAN disguised as a merchant, who bows obsequiously to the PRINCE and the COUNT.*]

STÉPAN.

Most worthy Highness, I am commissioned to treat about a trifle with your Magnificence, which our town-council and my employer, the manager of the theatre, think you would willingly give heed to. Our Emperor loves his Russians ('He does, he does,' *from all parts of the hall*), and 'tis thought that, on his fête day, it would please him well if, when he asked 'Who is this damsel that has taken the chief part in our festival?' (the *prima donna*, as we musicians say), the town could answer, 'Exalted Czar, it is a Russian girl, one that belonged to Prince Lanskof, whose fine taste for all the arts is known throughout the empire.' Now, rumour says your Highness has some such

damsel. They have sent me, relying on a poor judgment which has been somewhat tried in France and Italy, and to which some people are good enough to say the Opera at Petersburg perhaps owes something.

COUNT (*aside*).

The clever dog, how well he apes the manners of those people. Ermolaï must have drilled him well.

STÉPAN.

I must be frank with your High Excellency; and if rumour, which, pardon me, often promises a wonderful swan when it is but a weak gosling,—should have misinformed us in this matter, your Greatness will, I say, excuse me, if, in the interests of my high employers, I do not feel myself at liberty to proceed any further in the affair. It was the same thing when I went to Milan to engage Madame Freduccini. Very painful! But I was obliged to put a weighty finger on a great fault.

COUNT (*aside*).

Excellent.

STÉPAN.

There was a coarseness in one or two of her upper notes—a certain coarseness;—in fact, I would rather

have died than have had a hand in such a questionable transaction; for, as I said before, there are people who are pleased to rely somewhat on my poor judgment.

PRINCE (*aside*).

The damnable coxcomb! But he shall hear what a Russian girl, one of my people, can do. (*Aloud*)—Send for Oulita, and ask the Princess to come with her. Bid the musicians enter the gallery.

[*Exit* ATTENDANT.

What say you, Count?

For henceforth my affairs are thine, what say you?

COUNT.

I have so little care for art and artists:—
Solid magnificence is more to my taste,
And ample width of land;—that wood we entered in,
(That odious churl's where you recalled the chase,
Not liking—which I well can understand—
To accept that parvenu's hollow courtesy)
I'd rather have than fifty singing maidens.
Nothing irks me so much as to be clipped in
By such a fellow, and in such a fashion.
Besides, the Czar may like—

(*Enter* PRINCESS and OULITA.)

PRINCE.

You think the Czar—
Why, that indeed might make a difference.—

(*aside to the PRINCESS*).

The girl looks tawdry ;
Has heard of this, and thinks such dress becoming.

(*to the COUNT*).

Oulita's not herself !

COUNT.

It may be so.

The smallest corner of the smallest wood
That pinches in your vast domains, my Lord,
Would, in my humble judgment, far exceed
The worth of fifty such. Besides, my Lord,
To tell the truth, the girl is ordinary.
But we must make the coxcomb bite, and not
Too soon complete the bargain.

OULITA (*aside*).

The girl is ordinary ! This from you !
For now I know you well—no foster-brother.
The girl is ordinary. He would sell me,
Would he ? At least I will not be his scorn.

COUNT (*aside*).

To have one word with her I'd give this hand.
They've fired the mine too soon. 'Tis always so.

PRINCE.

Oulita, here's a man who thinks 'tis possible
A Russian maid might sing a Russian song
Without some falseness in the notes : he deigns
To think so ; but his worship is not confident.
Pray you convince this doubting connoisseur.
If I might give advice, the song you sang
When the Grand Duke arrived.
Silence throughout the hall !

[*The COUNT tries to speak to OULITA.*

The PRINCE seizes hold of him.

PRINCE.

No, no : you'll frighten her.

[*OULITA moves to the musicians, and sings.*

THE END OF THE REBEL STENKO-RAZIN'S LOVE.

*The barge was moored on Volga's shore, the stream
Went murmuring sorrowfully past :
The water-lilies played amidst the gleam
Their golden armour, moon-lit, cast.*

*Mute sat the Persian captive by her mate,
And gazed at her lover askance ;
A little of love and something of hate
Were couched in that dubious glance.*

*‘ Base that I am,’ he cried, ‘ dear stream, to thee,
Who, rebel too, with willing waves
Hast borne my armies up to victory,
And floated down the gold and slaves.’*

*He mused ; he turned ; and smiling on her charms,
He met that look of love and hate :
Lightly he took her in his mailed arms,
And casting, left her to her fate.*

*One lily more went shimmering ’midst the gleam
Their golden armour, moon-lit, cast :
That lily slowly sank beneath the stream ;
Volga went sadly murmuring past.*

*‘ Murmur no more,’ the chief replied, ‘ no more
What I loved best to thee I gave.’
His fierce men shuddered, but from fear forbore
The Persian lady’s life to save.**

(Great applause.)

* This deed of Stenko-Razin’s was seen by a traveller.
See *Relation des particularitez de la rebellion de Stenko-*

COUNT (*aside*).

Oh God ! how mad a thing is vanity !
Piqued by dispraise (she must have overheard)
She is resolved to triumph, and 'tis ruin !
But no new thing ! Have I not often seen
The wisest men commit the selfsame folly,
Making by their best gifts their choicest enemies ;
With simpering vain delight prepare their downfall,
And, chuckling, dig their graves with their own
paws ?
Confound the wench ! How well she sings.

PRINCE LANSKOF.

Well sung. I love not though these rebel songs.
A lighter thing. The ballad of the girl
Who would not tell her love.

OULITA *sings*.

She glanced o'er the mead ; she looked at the sky ;—
' To-morrow you quit the shore : '

*Razin contre le Grand Duc de Moscovie, Episode de l'histoire
de Russie du XVIIe siècle, précédé d'une introduction et d'un
glossaire par le Prince AUGUSTIN GALITZIN.*

No sigh from her breast, no tear in her eye :

‘ We never may see you more.

Good-bye, good-bye.

The wind is fair, good-bye.’

The sob of the wave as it breaks away

From the beach in tears of foam ;

The sighs of the breeze as at close of day

It sinks to its western home,

Their fears display,

Their hoarded love betray.

She glanced o’er the mead ; she looked at the sky ;

‘ To-morrow you quit the shore ; ’

No sigh from her breast, no tear in her eye :

‘ We never may see you more.

Good-bye, good-bye.

The wind is fair, good-bye.’

[General acclamation.

STÉPAN.

There is a something, and there is not a something. There is a feeling, and there is not a feeling. But there are makings, makings, makings. The G is better than the Freduccini’s G. But, pardon me, exalted Excellency, if I presume to say that Nature

is very well in its way ; but that Art, as we have it at Petersburg, is a mirror which Nature must dress herself before, if she would be otherwise than rustic and dowdy. But there are makings, there are makings here. This is not a case of utter impossibility, like the Freduccini. What would you say now, Prince, to thirty thousand roubles ? I am not given to haggling ; it is not the way we do things at the Grand Opera at Petersburg.

PRINCESS MARIE.

Oh, father ! do not let his trumpery roubles
Deprive your state of such an ornament,
That well befits so great a Prince's household.
Perhaps the Czar himself might deign to honour us :
And then—

PRINCE.

Marie is right. No, not for untold roubles.
Steward ! see that this man is fitly lodged,
And bid him journey on his way to-morrow.

SMALL WISE MAN.

To-morrow is a fine bear ; but to-day is the dog
that hunts him. We, who have some gift for singing
—‘Do, Re, Me, Fa, Sol, La, Si, Do,’—we tenors and

counter-tenors, cannot see too soon the back of that Jew pedlar, else we shall all be carried off to Petersburg.

[*Exeunt the PRINCE, the COUNT, SMALL WISE MAN, and Attendants. MITCHKA remains, with one or two of the PRINCESS'S women.*]

PRINCESS MARIE (*to OULITA*).

Ungrateful girl! From mere display to break
Our compact, and from empty shallow love
Of serving men's applause, to risk the chance
Of being bought by that exuberant coxcomb,
And made a puppet of the stage.

OULITA.

'Twas not
From love of base applause.

PRINCESS.

You own you forfeited
Your word. What was it from, then?

OULITA (*hanging down her head*).

I do not know.

But this I know, I do not love applause
More than my betters.

PRINCESS.

False and insolent girl !

You broke your plighted word to me.

MITCHKA (*advancing to* PRINCESS).

To meet

'The Count she went the first day he arrived.

I followed her, and saw them.

PRINCESS.

Oh, the demure one !

That must not dance like other maidens. No !

And then, a forward hussy, seeks to attract

What notice men will ever give to such girls.

It does not seem you prospered with the Count.

But then his train—

OULITA.

You know such sneers are false

And most unwomanly. To be alone

I sought the wood. I am not one of those

Who cannot live unless they are admired.

PRINCESS.

'False,' girl, 'unwomanly'—such words to me !

You shall be taught to know your place. Here,

Mitchka.

[MITCHKA *advances*.

To-morrow morn this maiden shall be sent
For chastisement.

[*Exeunt PRINCESS and Attendants.*

MITCHKA.

I thought, my pretty maiden, there would come a time when you and I should understand each other better. You'll intercede for other people, will you? You'll call me brute and ruffian. I know you did. A man must act up to his nature. I would not prove your great sagacity to be in the wrong.

OULITA.

Be what you are. I do not think of you,
Base man.

[*Exit OULITA. MITCHKA follows her, laughing.*

Enter the COUNT and ERMOLAÏ.

COUNT.

I've heard it all.

News borne upon the wings of hate flies fast.
You think I'll bear it, do you, Ermolaï?
Let that dear flesh I dare not think of kissing,
Be tortured by the hangman's whip?—
Kill her they may, but scourge her they shall not.

This fair girl's champion here I stand, prepared
To risk my life against a multitude,
Czars, Princes, Boyards, with their hosts of serfs.
Let them come on, I say.

ERMOLAÏ.

Hush, hush, my Lord !

COUNT.

I'll face them all. We must fly with her, Ermolaï.
All plans are vain that time demand. This night
It must be done. To intercede is hopeless,
Pouring hot oil upon the flames of jealousy.
To-night we fly.

ERMOLAÏ.

No, no, it cannot be.
Fatal to you, to her—

COUNT.

We'll fight them, then,
And die in open battle for her.

ERMOLAÏ.

Be calm, my Lord.
Your rage bedims your reasoning.

COUNT.

Yes, yes.

We lose ourselves in passion. I am calm.

We'll talk of common news, the war in Hungary :

The last day's hunt went bravely, Ermolai.

I'm very calm—as calm as any madman.

Some means to-night of rescue—all our men

Lie close together in that wing, you said ?

ERMOLAI.

And there our forage—

COUNT.

Ha ! I see what must be done.

Great wrongs absolve us from nice remedies.

[Enter OULITA, and MITCHKA following in the distance. The COUNT is about to receive her affectionately, but draws up coldly on seeing MITCHKA.]

OULITA runs up to the Count. MITCHKA withdraws a little, and observes them.

OULITA.

Oh, Sir ! I know you now. If ever pity

Pierced for a moment through the polished mail

That guards your Lordship's heart, speak but one word ;

Speak for me to my justly-offended mistress.

I'm at the mercy of that man to-morrow.

Look at him ; think what mercy his will be.

Those hideous hands will joy to wield the scourge ;

And I a maiden ! Have you sisters, Sir ?

You seemed so kind and playful in the wood :

Your Highness deigned to jest with your poor vassal.

They say that jests disarm all wrath, unite

Unequals. Do not look on me so sternly.

COUNT.

I doubt not you were insolent, and well

Deserved rebuke and chastisement. *Fear not.**

Marie is just. Offence to her—*fear not*—

Is an offence to me. *To-night a rescue.*

Cling not to me, *and be prepared.* Away !

You shall be free. You trouble me too much.

Be ready. Not another word. *You marred our plan.*

Again I say I cannot listen to you.

The merchant was my serf. Go hence, go hence !

Trust us to-night, and—Look at Ermolai.

* The words in Italics in whispers.

He would not dare to thwart my lightest humour
As you have done your lady's. *He will come*
To-night. No shrieking. Now away! You plague
me!

No woman's fear to-night. Begone!

[*Exit OULITA.*

Mitchka! come hither.

MITCHKA.

Here, my Lord.

COUNT.

That girl—

Her name?—

MITCHKA.

Oulita—

COUNT.

Is given to you for punishment
To-morrow. Is't not so?

MITCHKA.

It is, your Excellency.

COUNT.

I would not counsel an extreme severity;
But there must not be too much tenderness—

You understand. The menial who insults
My lady-love, braves me. Your place is one
Of trust. Be sure of my regard. Now go.

[*Exit* MITCHKA.

Accursed beast, and most inveterate villain !
Dare but to look at her with insolence,
Much less to touch her with thy hangman's hand,
And if it costs me name, and fame, and life,
I'll run you through the body with this sword :
Before them all I'll do it. By Heaven, I will.

[*Turns to* ERMOLAÏ.

I think I've duped the scoundrel.

[*Exeunt* COUNT and ERMOLAÏ. *Re-enter*
MITCHKA *in the gallery.*

(*Enter* VASILI ANDROVITCH, *hurriedly.*)

MITCHKA.

Stay, stay. Here is a musician has a song for
you, well worth your worship's hearing.

[*Comes down*

VASILI.

I know the news. The day is ours, good Mitchka.
I see the three thousand roubles glistening in your
hands ; and, unless I am mistaken, I see the agree-
ment of betrothal signed by the delicate Oulita trem-

bling in mine. But much is to be done. The Princess will repent. She is roaming about the house in an agony of angry indecision. She will repent.

MITCHKA.

Not she ! she is as fierce as ten water-fiends. Did she forgive the page whom she had brought up from a baby ?

VASIL.

True ! But the Count will interfere.

MITCHKA.

Ha, ha, ha ! Oh, yes ! the Count will interfere ! He feared lest I should be too tender, and any insult to the Princess pass without its due correction. He is young in the household, and does not know the tenderness of Mitchka.

VASIL.

That is strange, and not quite natural, I think. He certainly was whispering tender things to the girl the night when first we watched them. I hate him. I wish he would interfere. I would stir up such a flame of jealousy in the Princess, that you should see how much of the wild cat of the woods

there is in our little daughter of the house. But much is to be done. You must contrive that such a hopeful message meets Oulita's ear, that she consent to meet me here instantly.

MITCHKA.

Remember, Vasili Androvitch, it is from my regard for you, as well as for those few foolish roubles, that I forego my own revenge, which I should be sure of in my own way. But this is a weakness. Her marriage with you will be a long and savoury revenge. I doubt not she will be sufficiently miserable.

VASILI.

Go to, you mocking slave ! See that she meet me instantly.

[*Exit* MITCHKA.

I alone could sway the Princess ;
I alone could induce the Prince to thwart his daughter ; I alone could make Mitchka tender and respectful, if the worst should come to the worst. And what would I not do for my betrothed ? Ha, ha, girl ! these are potent arguments. You'll listen now.

(*Enter* OULITA.)

OULITA.

Sir, it was told me that you sought an interview.
I'm watched. The moments now are precious.

VASILI.

Are they?

OULITA.

You know they are.

VASILI.

I know that I can save you,
And no one else. Time is not lost with me.

OULITA.

Perhaps you can.

VASILI.

The Prince believes in me :
He must believe. Mitchka will do my bidding.
I might assuage the Princess. I alone
Am master of thy fate,—and thou of mine,
Oulita. But one word : be my betrothed.
No crowd of boisterous, sneering, brutal men
Shall watch the scourge descend on the bare limbs
Of my betrothed, and pass their odious jests,
While the blue lines rise up beneath the thong
Of Mitchka, whose propensity to mildness,
Well known to all of us, alarms the Count,

Lest any insult be too lightly punished
Which a bold girl had offered to his lady-love.

OULITA.

And these are men—and this is how they think
To win a woman's love! Why, man, if word
Of thine could save me from the shame and agony
You dwelt upon so lovingly—'Blue lines'
Of quivering flesh! (I could have heightened up
The hideous scene),—and if one word, I say,
Of thine could save me, and I'd loved thee hitherto,
And, for thy powerful word of intercession
Thou didst demand my love, I would unlove thee.

VASILI.

You know not what awaits you, girl.

OULITA.

I do.

Shall I rehearse it? Shall I paint the crowd?
Shall I foretell the brutal jests of men?
Shall I depict the pitying sneers of women—
Coarse girls who envy me? Shall I confess
That all the hell around me would be naught
Compared with that within of my own making?
Must I draw every cruel lineament

Of the detested scene, to prove to you
That I foresee it all, while I decline
The honour of your hand to save me from it?

VASILI.

Oulita, listen ! 'Tis not this alone—
A service not indeed to be despised,—
But afterwards the homage of my life,
My wealth laid at your feet, your every wish
Fulfilled, if not forestalled.

OULITA.

You see the sun
From out that oriel window, how he sinks
Beneath the waste, leaving a long sweet afterthought
Of tender twilight haze—the silent sun—

(musingly)—

(What must he think of this strange world, and of
The men upon it ? yet he does return) ;
You see that sun our pagan ancestors
Were wont to worship with rich gifts and incense ;
Think you he ever changed his course on their
Account, to humour them ? He changed it more
For their fine gifts than ever from indifference
A woman changed to love because her lover
Drove a nice bargain, proffering great service,

And haggling for her love. No, Vasili,
You cannot purchase the unpurchasable.
Save me, you may, if you think fit. I will
Requite you with unbounded gratitude,
And to my dying hour will be your debtor,
Thinking all service light that could be rendered you
But of my love not one iota—no,
Not one, on that account. This is my clear,
My last resolve. Humbly I take my leave.

[*Exit* OULITA.

VASILII.

It shall go on, for at the last her pride
May break, and at the last there's hope. [*Exit.*

(*Enter* COUNT, followed by ERMOLAI, who holds in his hands drawings of the Château).

COUNT.

Nothing remains but this ; all other plans
Are but half measures, redolent of failure,
As such things always are. Oulita's here—

(*points to the plan*)—

The Princess here ; we must pass through her
chamber.

The height's too great to scale. My plan is this :

At thirteen minutes after twelve has struck
The fire commences. Keep to the odd minutes,
Which less suspicion breeds. When to a height
That may be seen from all the castle, rise
The flames, begin your clamour—wake the inmates.
You to Oulita rush, I to the Princess.
You bear her down to Stépan, still disguised
As a Jew merchant. To the wood they hasten,
And rest hard by the Fairy's Fountain, where
We met. Oulita knows. In fifteen minutes
He must resume his way, if all is quiet
And if pursued, we follow hastily
To embarrass the pursuit: I to the wood;
And with our men you follow at the heels
Of those who may pursue—that would be best:
Mislead, encumber, quarrel with their men;
And if we are discovered in the wood,
And naught remains but force, then ride them down;
We have the weightier horses.

ERMOLAÏ.

What a chief

Of the police is lost in you, my Lord!

COUNT.

Oh yes, a noble chief! We have some gifts,

It must be owned, my Ermolai, that would
Have graced us much in that exalted sphere.
Two horses (black St. George for her, the roan
For him) at the west entrance of the wood
Must be in waiting, where the two arched chestnuts,
The lords of all around—one named the Prince—
Spread their gaunt arms. Our men we must instruct
To be exactly ready for a start—
But not too obviously ready ; each
Must know full well where all his trappings lie,
But nothing more—nothing that can be brought
In evidence against us, marking preparation.
No horses must be saddled ; no, nor men
Afoot, but those who ply the fire. Leave naught
To skill in acting ; let it all be real.

ERMOLAI.

Great, very great ! What would the Baron say ?

COUNT.

That by long years of toil I might become
Almost as great a scoundrel as himself—
But do not talk of him ;—three times to day
I've shadows seen that moved not with the wind,
And were not like the foliage I sate under.

I did not turn, but knew that we were spied upon.
That Vasili, the steward, he mistrusts us.

ERMOLAI.

The Prince pays dearly for his hospitality,
My Lord.

COUNT.

Be comforted, my Ermolai :
His loss shall be repaid to the last rouble.
If, by some evil chance, the fire should spread
Beyond the pile of forage in the courtyard,
The wing shall be rebuilt, and be, if possible
(For architects are hard to guide) a shade
Less out of taste.—But fetch the men.

[*Exit* ERMOLAI.

A curious thing
Is conscience ! Ermolai could be a spy
Upon his friend, report his lightest word,
To his worst enemy—such was his business ;—
But not without due protest would engage
In any scheme that threatened to despoil
A wealthy prince of some few trumpery roubles.
His conscience halts at that—The comedy
Of life ! There's nothing like it on the stage,
Nor ever will be.

(Enter ERMOLAIÏ and men.)

Ha ! my trusty friends,

I need a special service at your hands—

A service that may cost your lives. Are they

At my disposal.

THE MEN.

Yes ! they are, my Lord.

COUNT.

I thought as much, and thank you heartily.

A girl, one of yourselves, is to be flogged.

I've sworn she shall not be. Your master's word

Is dear to all of you !

THE MEN.

It is, your Excellency.

COUNT.

Perhaps, a little after twelve has struck

To-night, there may spring up a fire within

Your quarters. You will rise as men surprised,

Not as forewarned. Seek me and Ermolaï.

The girl will not be found. Pursuit may be

Required, and that pursuit must not succeed.

Insist upon their going your way. Ermolaï

Will show which way. Then jostle, struggle,
quarrel—

(Men suddenly awaked are quarrelsome) ;

If all else fail, the sword must judge between us
And now your hands. I've trusted you as a man
Should trust the men he summons into danger
On his behoof ; and if, in aught, my friends,
I've e'er offended you, forgive me now.

A master's part is sometimes not so easy ;
And absolute power a sword which few men wield
With perfect skill, used only to protect
And not to injure. Once again, farewell !

(The men are about to withdraw).

But stay ! another word, the most imperative.
There is a feast to-night. You will be urged,
And not by friends, to pledge your master's health
In hastening cups. Drink warily, the least
That obviates remark—or not his health,
But his destruction, sure enough you'll drink ;
Nor his alone, but yours. Of some reward
I might have spoken, but I deemed rewards
Unworthy to be named in such an enterprise,
Where hazard is the first thing to be thought of.
He that shares this with me shall share of much
Besides. Now go !

[Exeunt the COUNT'S serfs.

(To ERMOLAÏ). The trumpets sound for this most
tiresome banquet

With country lords, and much provincial oratory.

Drink largely at your table, Ermolaï,

As I at mine. We are the men whose brains

Are not disturbed by small potations.

ERMOLAÏ.

I'll drink !

They shall not wonder that a fire broke out

To-night.

COUNT.

Oh ! that these arid compliments,

And all the weary falseness that besets

Great banquets, were but o'er, and we were looking

Athwart these dreary flats, and waiting for

The signal. You have passed the Steppes with me.

I know not how it is, but all day long

One of those weird statues * that we saw—

* 'On entering upon the Steppe, all trace of human life disappears, and the traveller sees nothing but the heavens above him, and the boundless flat green carpet spread out around, while here and there small and regularly-formed mounds rise up to his view. On either side he perceives also low ridges of hills ; and upon these again, at intervals, larger conically-shaped mounds. The latter are occasionally surmounted by roughly-cut stone figures, which

A relic of great nations, long consigned
To uttermost oblivion—comes before me.
It is the embodied purpose of my soul.—
But no more dreaming. (*The trumpets sound.*)

Hark, those brassy plagues

Again!— [Exit ERMOLAÏ.

We shall succeed—I will not let a doubt
Intrude upon my mind,—we shall succeed.
This one injustice may be remedied.
But then the things that have been—why they come
Upon me now I wot not: hideous deeds
Long numbered with the past. The Earth may smile,
And deck herself each May, vain thing! with flowers,
And seem forgetful of the cruelties
Enacted on her ever-changing stage,
Till every spot upon the storied surface
Is rank with tragic memories: beauteous slaves,

look down like ghosts upon the silent desert. . . . The country over which they are scattered, as already ascertained, comprises more than 600,000 square miles. The statues are made of a stone which is not found nearer than four hundred miles from the spots where they have been erected; and this is not the case with regard to one statue only, but to thousands.'—*The Russian Empire, its People, Institutions, and Resources.* By BARON VON HAXTHAUSEN. Vol. II. chapter ii. pp. 79, 80.

Like dear Oulita, forced to endure, half-crazed,
Caresses which they loathe ; and children slain
Before their mother's eyes ; and women murdered
(Happy if murdered soon) in the dear presence
Of those who till that moment ever looked at them
With reverent tenderness, and now dare not look ;
Whose corded limbs, straining in agony,
Have lost—the wretch's last resource—the power
To give them death. Then the fantastic horrors
Of torture, nicely weighed and planned with skill,
Just to the limit which man's frame can bear :
And, worse, the grief of long imprisonment,
Each day profoundly like its yesterday—
The dawn a turnkey's face, the eve discerned
Only by some increase of numb discouragement,
That's not fatigue. The earth may smile, I say,
But like a new-made widow's mirth, it shocks one.
And she, the earth, should never quit her weeds ;
And should there come a happier race upon her,
Ever there'll be a sighing of the wind,
A moaning of the sea, to hint to that
More favoured race what we poor men have suffered.
There must have been a history, they'll say,
To be interpreted by all these sighs
And moans.

(*Re-enter* ERMOLAÏ.)

ERMOLAÏ.

You have been waited for, my Lord.

COUNT.

A new race will be right.—I come.

[*Flourish of trumpets. Exeunt COUNT
and ERMOLAÏ.*

SCENE II.

Hall in the Castle.

*Great banquet. Guests assembled. Enter the COUNT,
who takes his seat beside the PRINCESS MARIE.*

SONG (*from Chorus of singers*).

*The war-horse is neighing,
The trumpets are braying,
The young soldiers praying,—
Strike for the Czar !*

*Beneath the mist, and in the dusty vale,
The hot beams glancing from their corslet's mail,
Our ranks the foe is hurrying to assail.*

*Through the blood-stained hail of war,
Shimmering like a moon-lit lake afar,
Upwards they come.
Strike for the Czar !*

*The cannon are pounding,
The trumpets are sounding,
The welkin resounding,—
Strike for the Czar !*

*The plunging iron whizzes through the air.
Mid dust and smoke, their squadrons madly tear ;
A wall of steel moves up, the bayonets glare ;
‘ Something trickles down my side : ’
‘ ’Tis but a flesh-wound ;—in your ranks abide.’
Straight on they come.
Strike for the Czar !*

COUNT.

Who, my dear Marie, are the rustic potentates ?
Who gives our health ?

PRINCESS.

That weighty-looking man,
The Governor.

COUNT.

That chest capacious threatens

Long speech. The weight of body holds out hopes
Of brevity. A man so large and owl-like
Need not speak long to prove his wisdom. Hush !
He rises.

GOVERNOR.

Our province is much honoured ; honoured much
Our province must regard itself—a Province
The Emperor deigned to call his pearl, when last
He honoured our poor government with notice :
I say, the Province holds itself rejoiced—

COUNT (*to PRINCESS*).

How strange, when a man rises after dinner,
That all his brains desert their place, and move
Towards his feet ! Look how he twists his napkin.

GOVERNOR.

Rejoiced, I say, the province ever must be
At having such a son-in-law—I mean
The Prince, whose daughter—'tis no breach of
secrecy—

Is to our illustrious guest, Count Straubenheim,
Betrothed. [*Great cheering.*

COUNT (*to PRINCESS*).

Blush, Marie ; blush. They'll say these Peters-
burghers

Have small conception of good manners, if
We do not.

GOVERNOR.

That glad event completed, and the Count
One of ourselves, good gentlemen, adopted
By this exalted Province, which the Emperor
Is pleased to honour with his special approbation,
Proceeds—for 'tis no breach of secrecy—
On some high embassy, perhaps to England.—
I would not seem to know more than I know,
But mostly what I say in public happens.—
Proceed to England does the Count, where nobly
He will acquit himself of his high functions.
I wish to others it had fallen, who worthily,
More worthily than I ('*No, no!*'), with fitter words,
Could give the health of Count von Straubenheim,
And of his lovely bride that is to be.
The Princess and the Count, my Lords ; full
bumpers.

The Princess and the Count !

[*The toast is received with acclamation.*

COUNT.

If I responded for myself alone,
It would not be so difficult, my Lord,

In terms of apt humility to meet
The gracious words which have been kindly lavished
On my most poor deserts—

[*Enter, in breathless haste, one of the
COUNT'S men, who presses up to him
with a letter.*

Permit a moment !

[*He rises and comes forward on the
stage.*

GOVERNOR.

No doubt some urgent missive from the Emperor.

FIRST LORD.

'Tis said of London that three times a year
They see the sun, and there are great rejoicings.

SECOND LORD.

Throughout those foggy lands the men are full
Of gravity and purpose.

COUNT (*reading letter*).

*'The Cossack, Michel Boulba, enticed by some
amongst the Prince's men, is wildly drunk and furious ;
clamours out what should be secret ; calls for torches ;*

and will breed a great disturbance, if not swiftly silenced. Some of our men second him. The flames may break out at any moment.'

(To Messenger.)

Stab him to the heart ! But, stay ! there was a well in the courtyard behind your quarters. Plunge him in that. Then drag him out, and if the brute is silent, merely put a guard. But if he babbles, stab him to the heart, I say. You have my word for it.

(The COUNT returns to the company.)

I said it would be easy for myself
Poorly to answer, beggared by unworthiness,
Your loving salutations, my good friends.
But, as the mouthpiece of this noble lady,
And of the Prince, moreover one adopted
By this distinguished Province, I must strive
To attain a force that's quite beyond my own,
And make myself a fitting foster-brother
For those who are, indeed, our country's pride.
Their fire, their truth, their earnest patriotism,
And, above all, their duty to their Sovereign,
I must exemplify in foreign lands ;
Not as my own, but theirs,—their creature, I
More like them, too, as the more faithfully

I execute the Czar's behests. Are we
Not one, both Prince and people, undivided—
From the dim Baltic to Crimea's shore,
From Warsaw to the golden Ural mountains,
One holy people, whose all-conquering force
Is deftly wielded by one potent arm,
Making the fable of celestial giants
No more a fable, but a living truth,
And all our wills concentered in one breast?
With duteous thanks for all the honour heaped
Upon myself, upon this noble lady,
And the good Prince, her father, I respond
To your high courtesy ;
And mounting upwards to far higher themes
Than any subject's praise, permit me, ere
We part, to give our Sovereign's health—
A Sovereign whom great Nature, when she set
Her stamp upon his lofty forehead—Nature,
That sometimes sleeps when kings are made,—
declared
A man in thought, in word, in act, in look,
Fit for the sway of boundless empire.
Here's to the Czar !

[*The toast is drunk with great acclamation.*

COUNT (*aside to the PRINCESS*).

Was that the proper nonsense for this Province ;
What was expected of me ?

PRINCESS (*aside to the COUNT*).

Bravely done,
You mocking man. Shall you befool your wife,
And as you suit yourself to these good rustics,
Talk down to her what is expected of you ?

COUNT.

No, you must be deluded differently.

PRINCESS.

You own 'twill be delusion.

(*The fire is seen outside the windows
of the hall. Exit ERMOLAÏ. Enter,
hurriedly, VASIL ANDROVITCH, fol-
lowed by many of the COUNT'S men.*)

VASIL.

The north wing is in flames, my Lords !

(*The flames are seen to spread, the bells
toll, and there is great confusion in
the hall.*)

PRINCE LANSKOF.

Here follow me, my men.

(Exeunt PRINCE LANSKOF, the PRINCESS, the Guests, and the PRINCE'S Followers, except VASILI, who stands watching the COUNT.)

(Re-enter ERMOLAÏ, who rushes up to the COUNT.)

ERMOLAÏ *(aside)*.

The man who watched her fled at once. Stépan lost no time, and is already on his way with her.

COUNT.

Where are your hatchets, men? You, Ermolai,
Take the command of thirty men, and isolate
The northern tower.

VASILI.

There's treachery! Where's the accursed pedlar?
Where is Oulita? I see it all.

(Enter MITCHKA, dragging in OULITA, followed by STÉPAN, who is endeavouring to rescue her.)

MITCHKA.

Here, Master Vasili, here's your precious Oulita,

who was all but off with this thief and villain. I rushed through the flames, and am a little singed, but there shall be good payment for every hair.

VASIL.

Brave Mitchka! faithful Mitchka! This is
Indeed a service.

MITCHKA.

Ho, ho! my pretty maiden; were you so far on your road to Moscow? No doubt there were relays of horses for the great singer. Perhaps a little scourging will improve her voice.

COUNT.

Who talks of scourging—that detested slave?

[MITCHKA *draws his sword.*

COUNT.

Yes, draw, man! I would not worry a rat in a closed room, nor slay a creature such as thou art, without giving it a chance for its base life. I am her champion.

[*They fight. Meanwhile VASIL and STÉPAN fight. MITCHKA is killed.*

COUNT.

There, wretch, is an honourable death for thee, much too honourable.

[*The COUNT and STÉPAN then overpower VASIL.*

COUNT.

Bind him, Stépan, and take him with you.

STÉPAN.

A prudent merchant, my Lord, is never without cordage.

[*He binds VASIL.*

COUNT.

You shall have three men to bear you company. Watch him night and day. He is a refractory serf whom you are taking back to my domains. (*Turns to OULITA.*)

I said you should be free, and free you are.

Your horses wait; the road is clear to Moscow.

He goes with you (*pointing to STÉPAN*), and will ensure your safety.

Nearer: a word! I loathe this hateful marriage.

'Tis forced upon me by the Czar. Escape

I may, and then—

No ! this is not the time—
When you are wholly free, you can reject me.

OULITA.

Reject thee ? Never !

[*They embrace. The curtain falls.*]

ACT III.

SCENE I.

Moscow. Bureau of Police.

Enter BARON GRÜBNER, *and* MARDARI KHAILOVITCH, *one of* COUNT VON STRAUBENHEIM'S *Stewards.*

BARON GRÜBNER.

Large sums of money called for suddenly ?

You've been his steward now for fifteen years.

Large sums of money called for suddenly :

There is not much in that ; these love betrothals

Demand some splendour, (*aside*) and the less the
love

The greater splendour ; (*aloud*) and the retinue

Immense ?

COUNT'S STEWARD.

Immense, my Lord.

BARON GRÜBNER.

What else ?

COUNT'S STEWARD.

The Count's serenity
Is strangely discomposed. When my report
I rendered, in the maddest way he seized
And shook me.

BARON GRÜNER.

What the occasion ?

COUNT'S STEWARD.

A mere nothing.
In reading o'er the list of punishments
On the estate since May : I chanced to name
Some thirty lashes an old crone received
For theft. He took me by the throat, and stormed,
And swore. Had I a mother, or a sister?
And did I know the sacred claims of womanhood ?
I was a wretch, a beast.—And all this coil
About a daft old crone.

BARON GRÜBNER.

Her name ?

COUNT'S STEWARD.

Oulita.

BARON GRÜBNER.

Well, nothing more ?

COUNT'S STEWARD.

There is a recent scar
Upon his wrist.

BARON GRÜBNER.

The fire that tedious Prince
Comes pestering about,—the fire broke out
Where the Count's men were quartered.

(*Enter SERVANT.*)

SERVANT.

Prince Lanskof waits, my Lord.

GRÜBNER.

Retire ! Bid him come up.

[*Exeunt SERVANT and STEWARD.*]

(*Enter the PRINCE.*)

No further clue,
My Prince ? No new fact ?

PRINCE.

There are facts enough :
One serf absconded, and one slain ; my steward
Not heard of, and a fire not accidental,
That might have left me houseless. All this, too,
When I was bent on honouring the Count.

The Province is disgraced if such a crime
Goes scatheless, and—

GRÜBNER.

The Count's sagacity,
And all his zeal availed you nought, you say ?
The Steward's name ? I did not take a note
Of that.

PRINCE.

'Tis Vasili, the son of Andrew.

GRÜBNER.

The maiden's name, the absconded one ?

PRINCE.

Oulita.

GRÜBNER (*springing up*).

Good Heavens ! You told me not before. Oulita ?

[PRINCE *makes a sign of assent.*

There's much in names.

PRINCE.

Ah ! the Police is wonderful !

There's much in names, then ?

GRÜBNER.

Yes—where is your daughter ?

PRINCE.

She waits below.

GRÜBNER.

I'll see her instantly,
Alone ; for maidens like to be alone,
When questioned. [Exit PRINCE.

Double-dotted ass, and idiot !
Not to have seen this sooner. What's the good
Of hate, if it instructs one not ? Oulita !
That's why it touched him : all who bear the name
Are dear to him : and that fool, Ermolai,
He thought, in his simplicity, the Count
Cared not for women. Why, without these darlings,
What would become of the Police ?

(Enter PRINCESS MARIE.)

Most welcome.

This crime your father takes so much to heart
We must unravel. Men in love are careless.
The Count von Straubenheim is given to musing.
The fire commenced in his apartments ?—

PRINCESS.

No.—

BARON GRÜBNER.

Ah ! not in his, but in his men's

PRINCESS.

It did.

GRÜBNER.

That Jew ! Was there the slightest sign to show
He recognised the girl Oulita ?

PRINCESS.

None,

Perceived by me.

GRÜBNER.

The Count esteemed her not—
I mean her singing ?

PRINCESS.

No, the Count is skilled
In every art but music. He, indeed,
Would have advised her sale.

GRÜBNER.

He would ?

PRINCESS.

The Count

Pronounced her malapert, and much o'errated.

GRÜBNER.

He did ? (*Aside.*) I warrant, now, the merchant
was

A creature of the Count's. (*Aloud.*) They used to
say

In Petersburg, Princess, a brighter wit
Than yours there was not, yet in love affairs
How simple. Why, a stupid, dull old man
Like me, his wits quite lost o'er musty papers,
Sees further—further much—in amorous affairs
Than those bright eyes. Well might the Prince
exclaim,

Your father, 'The Police is wonderful!'

What should you say, now—nay, look not so
scared,—

If your fine Count were proved the merchant's friend?
Oulita's flight designed by him, the Count?
The fire so opportune, by him arranged—
His fire: and the pursuit—for he pursued
Most eagerly—not a pursuit, a rescue?

PRINCESS.

Simply ridiculous!

GRUBNER.

It may be so.

Will you consent to prove it? Try the Count.
Dwell on the punishment that overhangs
Oulita; hint that the Police lacks not

A clue to this great crime. See if he pales not ;
And then return to me.

PRINCESS.

Simply ridiculous !
The Count, that most fastidious man !—a serf !
A singing-girl !

GRÜBNER.

The first time in the world,
No doubt, it is, a great man ever loved
A singing-girl. I am a dull old fool.
I said so at the first. Suspicious, too,—
A trick of age. But you consent to try him ?

PRINCESS.

I do. Baron, we'll laugh at this hereafter.

[*Exit* PRINCESS.]

GRÜBNER.

Laugh, will you, lady ? But the laugh shall be
The hysteric laugh of jealous agony.

[*Curtain falls.*]

SCENE II.

A Street in Moscow.

Enter the COUNT and ERMOLAI; the latter muffled up in a cloak.

ERMOLAI.

He thinks I am at Petersburg, sent thither
Your marriage gewgaws to prepare.

COUNT.

Why, man,

You fear that Grübner, as some puny sorcerer
Cowers down before the invulnerable arts
Of some supreme magician whom he knows
His master-fiend.

ERMOLAI.

I know how many spirits
Obey this master-fiend : I feel their presence
In every street, and fear them most when none
I see. 'Tis true I am disguised ; but so
Are they.

COUNT.

What message did she send ?—how looks she ?

ERMOLAI.

Bravely, my Lord. I scarce could recognise
The timid, shrinking serf that was Oulita
In the superb and richly-vestured damsel
That met my gaze with aspect quite serene,
And bright, from hope ;—indeed, I made my
obeisance
Ere I addressed her.

COUNT.

Birth's a great thing, my friend,
But not the birth that heralds trumpet forth—
Not always—that may be effete and sapless.
Oft-times a cunning mixture of great lineages,
Great, though obscure, breaks out in the humblest
peasant
As in the highest-born of escutcheoned nobles ;
And could we trace that girl's descent, her loveliness,
Her grace would be accounted for, I doubt not ;
For Nature, though she slaves in secret, works
No miracles. Well, but the message, Ermolai ?

ERMOLAI.

Whatever hour you quit the Kremlin ball
To-night, my Lord, she will await your Lordship.
She begged me to come, too. She fears, perhaps—

COUNT.

She need not fear. Ah ! what a path we've entered,
My trusty Ermolaï ! How to dissolve
This loathed betrothal—how to escape Siberia,
Whose dreary wastes seem beckoning to me—
How to deal honourably with the Princess ?
(She sent for me to-day)—I do not think
She loves, though. —'Tis a most bewildering
business ;

And when one enters in the lists against
Such odds, the slightest error leads to ruin.
A child throws orange-peel upon the arena :
The gladiator slips, and dies ! The metaphor
Is sordid, but not more so than the life
'Tis drawn from. Ermolaï, this graceful Princess
I go to meet, has all the savage virtues
That we ascribe to wildest animals,
And all the vices. As a thing to tame,
If not to love, it might be worth the doing.
But no ! I cannot love her. The tigress' nature
Disgusts me, though it daunts me not. Adieu !

[*Exeunt, by different ways.*

SCENE III.

Room in PRINCE LANSKOF'S House in Moscow.

The PRINCESS MARIE sitting at a work-table.

PRINCESS.

Most women say it soothes their minds—this work,
But 'tis not so with me. I seem to hear
His footsteps : instantly the threads become
Entangled. What, Marie ! You love this man,
This cold fastidious man, who regulates
His loving words with nicest touch of courtesy,—
A faultless cavalier, but all the while
Most faulty as a lover. Hark ! his step !

(Enter COUNT VON STRAUBENHEIM.)

COUNT.

The Emperor's come !

PRINCESS *(aside)*.

As if we wanted news !

COUNT.

The ball's to-night, and Marie must eclipse

All other dames in splendour. Here's a trifle,
More noticeable for the skill in setting
Than for the gems themselves.

[*Produces a tiara of diamonds, which
he puts on the PRINCESS's head.*

PRINCESS.

The Count's good taste
No one will fail to see. I, too, have good news.
That wonderful Police !—Why Count, how strange
You look ?

COUNT.

Nothing. That wonderful Police ?
'Tis most amusing, too, as well as wonderful.
I've known such stories. Well, proceed, proceed !

PRINCESS.

Oulita is not taken, but they are hard
Upon her steps.

COUNT.

Indeed ?

PRINCESS.

My father's joy
Is almost childish, for the good old man
Deemed this escape a personal insult to him—

An insult to his pryncedom ; if but once
We have that girl within our fangs, we'll teach her
What 'tis such loving masters to betray.
We'll have her life—slowly, her life.

COUNT.

Who are

The 'we' ?

PRINCESS.

Why, my good Lord, you would not
spare her ?

An insult to your Marie ; why, how righteously
You counselled Mitchka, the poor serf who died.
(*Aside*)—False man, I see it all ! (*Aloud*)—I'll
have her life !

[*Dashes down the tiara.*

COUNT.

And mine ! Play not with me an actress' part.
Tis not the Prince, but *you* have seen the Baron,
That worthy man, the Chief of the Police.
Deep in your breast lie doubts of me, of every one ;
And say the doubts were certainties—what then ?
Say that a beauteous girl awaited scourging ;
Say that a man—we'll put aside both Counts
And Princes—say this man declared the girl

Should not be scourged—nay, more! say out, he
swore it?

Say, too, this faithless man was the betrothed—

PRINCESS.

There's surely no such villain, my good Lord.

COUNT.

Nature is large, and villainy is various—
But I'll prolong my story: Say this man
Asked nothing from the girl he saved, although
He loved her.

PRINCESS.

Quite immeasurable insolence.

COUNT.

The truth, Marie!

PRINCESS.

The Princess Lanskof, Sir.

COUNT.

Princess, you see the Kremlin there? Its roofs,
Its gilded minarets, its cupolas,
Its towers? As varied, as grotesque in form,
Is the dread power that broods o'er Russia's des-
tinies;

Nor rules alone by exiles, stripes, or prisons.
One central tyranny, pervading now
Our subtlest thoughts, now clad in priestly claims,
Now to be seen in art, or song, or commerce,
(Such diverse forms it takes, no magic power,
Changing from shape to shape, is half so fanciful)
Besets the land.

Say that this man, this wretch, this perjured villain;
Who loved one girl the while he wooed another,
Or seemed to woo, was but a serf himself,
Enmeshed in craftiest toils, who chose a marriage
To save, if not his life, at least his freedom :
Freedom from exile—

No more I justify myself, nor seek
To avert by one submissive word your enmity :
I prithee, let it have its course. Think not
I've scorned your beauty, or prized not the wealth
Of wit, of soul, of fierce and loving brightness,
That dwells in you. Let us be noble enemies.
I would not ask you to befriend me, but
I would not have betrayal at your hands.
Not for my sake, for yours. Madam, farewell !

[*Exit the COUNT.*

PRINCESS.

But for this hateful girl he might have loved me.

How grand he seems, e'en in defeat ; for most men
In such a plight—so brought to bay—would lie,
And cringe, and lie, and make one long to spurn
them.

Shall I betray him ? It were sweet ;—revenge
Is sweet. His life's at stake. One word of mine
Makes the thing clear, gives that old spy the clue.
I cannot do it. No ! but her, Oulita !
Let me but once embrace her in this hate,
And it shall stifle her. No need of Mitchkas.
I'll do't myself !

[*Exit the PRINCESS.*

SCENE IV.

Hall in the Kremlin.

*A masked ball. The COUNT and ERMOLAIÏ advance
in front of the dancers.*

COUNT.

I had not time to tell thee, Ermolaiï :
They all consented. We are dressed alike—
All five.

ERMOLAÏ.

I know. These spies—they know it too : they've
marked

Your cloak with white, and I have marked the others.

We are but two, my Lord, against a multitude,

Apt for devices. I'll not quit my post.

To be with you is dangerous.

[*Exit* ERMOLAÏ.

(*Enter a Lady masked.*)

LADY.

I'll never speak again to you. You swore

You would not see her more, and yester-eve

Was given to her—to me some poor excuse.

But men are liars all.

(*Moves along.*)

COUNT.

Now there's a raging woman—not on me

The storm should fall. To me 'twas alien thunder.

Some one of my fair company of four

Has wronged that woman. If it were Oulita,

How different would be her tones ; how deep,

As not expressed, her mild untold reproaches,

Read in the heart alone—nor even there.

[*Enter the PRINCESS, masked and veiled,*
who touches the COUNT with her fan.

PRINCESS.

The ancient sages walked about in gardens,
Attended by a crowd of listening scholars.
The sages now attend masked balls. Their wisdom
Grows by a nice and careful observation
Of twinkling feet. Our meditative Count
Perceives high mysteries in mazy dances.
Is it not so ?

COUNT.

By your voice, you're beautiful.

PRINCESS.

An ordinary speech for one so choice
In compliments. If 'twere a serf girl, now,
The noble Count were flattering, he would use
Far more poetic flights (*COUNT starts*) ; some forward
creature,
Whom he, in his imaginative mind,
Deems an enchantress. Of all men alive
The scholar is the one who loves what he
Creates—a scullion or a queen,—the same
Good groundwork for his imagery.

COUNT.

Fair lady,

Whoe'er you are you much mistake the man

You honour by your notice ; there are others
In the same guise as mine. I'm drinking now
Words that should flow to other ears.

PRINCESS.

Not so.

Sir Count. No danger follows them. You are
A man of honour, as men's honour goes :—
Swear to obey my hest, and I will give
An amulet that shall preserve you safe
In moments of the greatest peril. Swear :
Swear only not to seek to penetrate
The mystery till peril comes.

COUNT.

I swear !

[*She gives him a letter and moves away.*
Afterwards the COUNT walks amidst
the crowd. Enter five Police Officers

FIRST POLICE AGENT.

They will come out together—be sure of that.
When they separate, let each of us follow his man at
a safe distance. I have disposed parties of our men
in the principal thoroughfares, so that if any of you
are over-matched, make the signal, and aid will be
sure to come. Let us be near the entrance.

[*Exeunt into the Ball-room.*

The COUNT comes out with four other lords. Afterwards, at some distance, the Police Agents.

COUNT.

At this point, then, we separate, my friends;
I'm much beholden to your courtesy.
With inmost feeling, as in outward garb,
Henceforth we are a brotherhood. Good night !

*[They separate, each one being followed
by a Police Agent. ERMOLAÏ appears
in the background. Scene closes.]*

SCENE V.

Room in a house in Moscow.

OULITA *at work upon embroidery.*

OULITA.

When will he come, when will he come ? Did men
See further into our hearts, would they despise
Us more ? We weary Time with prayers to pass :
We waste our stock of thought, devising words
That should convey, and not convey, how much
We love. And when the idol deigns to come,

Mute worshippers are we. I've read in books,
When ships meet on the sea's highway, that friends
Whose hearts have widowed been for weary years,
Meet, and say nothing; or, at best, of tides,
Of winds, and such-like trivialities
Discourse, as neighbours in the market-place ;
And then the ships sail on their different ways,
Carrying two 'wildered minds that mourn their
dumbness

For ever and for ever. So we lovers—
But hark ! He comes.

(Enter the COUNT.)

COUNT.

At last I'm here, Oulita.
Why, what a queen it is !

OULITA.

A queen of your
Enthronement, my good Lord ; they told me 'twas
Your wish I should appear in this disguise.

COUNT.

Disguised before, Oulita ; now yourself
I see.

OULITA.

(*Aside*)—Said I not right ? 'Twas of the winds
And waves the friends would talk. (*Aloud*)—The
ball, my Lord,

Was sumptuous, and the most unpleasant truths
Imparted by the maskers to each other ?

Put on your mask, and I will wrap this gauze
Around my head ; and we will meet as strangers.

(*Masked.*) Fair Sir, there is a maiden whom I
know—

She is not at the ball—that bade me come
And pour out all my heart in thanks to you
For some great benefaction. What it was
She said not ; and, indeed, a simple wench,
Fit to stoop o'er embroidery the whole
Day long, and murmur to herself her gratitude,
She bade me kiss your hand. For her I kiss it.
'Tis, as I said, a silly girl. At Court
She would be lost.

COUNT.

You speak in mysteries,
Fair mask. No girl owes gratitude to me.
Besides, I hate the word. Please you, so good,
Convey this kiss to her, [*Kisses her hand.*
And if you find

(So strange a girl it is) you cannot kiss her,—

I mean her lips—I must myself convey

My answer.

[*A knocking at the door. Enter ERMOLAÏ hastily.*

ERMOLAÏ.

My Lord, the house is beset. In vain I strove to waylay the man who followed you. His signal brought five others. I fled. They kept you still in view, I think, and will be here immediately.

[*Knocking resumed.*

COUNT.

Keep them in play, good Ermolaï.

[*Exit.*

(*Enter the Police Agents.*)

FIRST POLICE AGENT.

If I might presume to speak to so great a lady, I would say that her attendants wait to convey her to Prince Lanskof's, where, no doubt, she will be fittingly received with the honour due to her illustrious rank. Come, Oulita Bachmann, prepare to follow us ! Here are your master's orders, with his seal.

[ERMOLAÏ *walks up to the first Police-agent, and whispers.*

FIRST POLICE AGENT.

What, you are one of us ?

ERMOLAIÏ.

Yes, I had an inkling of what was going on, and came here, though alone, to see what could be done. I pretend to be a musician. Show me Prince Lanskof's order. (*Reads it carefully to himself.*) Quite right. You must be firm. How many men have you ? There may be resistance.

POLICE AGENT.

Ten outside.

ERMOLAIÏ.

Very prudent ; they may all be wanted. Do not recognise me, for your lives : all would be spoilt. We must not go away together. Let them hear us in altercation. (*Raising his voice.*)—You shall not take this girl away, Sir. You overstep your powers, Sir.

POLICE AGENT.

Do you presume to interfere with me and my duty ? Fifty lashes of the knout——

[*Enter STÉPAN, disguised as an old merchant, speaking to the COUNT, who is masked, and enters with STÉPAN.*

STÉPAN.

No, Sir, there are no excuses. How dare you enter my house—‘honourable intentions!’ Oh yes, people always put on masks, and come from masked balls, with highly honourable intentions. I will appeal to our Father, the Czar, if a merchant and a purveyor of high art may not follow his calling and prepare something worthy of the Court of St. Petersburg, without being insulted, and his home broken into, by every dissolute noble. As to you, Sirs, I’m greatly your debtor for following this bad man. He is not a housebreaker, though.

FIRST POLICE AGENT.

What does this old gentleman mean? That young woman is one of Prince Lanskof’s serfs.

STÉPAN.

Yes, yes, I know. She absconded with a free-booter dressed as a merchant. The rascal sold her to me, and I have bought her again of the Prince. Oh dear! Oh dear! Twice bought! It is a ruinous purchase. But the Prince, excellent old nobleman, bless his Excellency, was kind to a poor merchant, and did not take so much as the villain charged me—

the villain who had stolen her away. (*To the COUNT.*)—Here, Sir, look at this paper. Prince Lanskof's own hand and seal; and see what you would rob me of; and not me, Sir, but the Emperor and the Grand Opera, and the great world? Providence does not send so many fine voices into the world that they should be thrown away on foolish young men—empty, profligate young men. I hate the young men of the present day!

FIRST POLICE AGENT.

Show me the paper! (*He reads it carefully.*) 'Tis the same seal, the same signature—dated to-day, stating all the circumstances, and sells the girl to him! This must have happened since the morning, and our chief knew nothing of it.

[ERMOLAÏ *shrugs his shoulders, and moves towards the agent of Police.*

ERMOLAÏ (*aside to the Police Agent*).

I suppose we must go. That foolish old Prince! This is the way the Police is befooled and disgraced. But he shall reckon with the Baron for this.

FIRST POLICE AGENT.

Good evening, gentlemen!

[*Exeunt Police Agents.*

STÉPAN (*to the COUNT, speaking loudly*).

I tell you, Sir, I will not endure it. I will have a patrol ; I will have guards ! It were better, Sir, that the Emperor's guard should be stationed here all day long than that the Grand Opera should lose one maiden who can sing. (*In a low tone to ERMOLAÏ*)—They are gone? (*Aloud*)—Ha, ha, ha ! We have routed them once more, dear master, though I wot not how you got that precious paper.

COUNT (*aside*).

Lightly I spoke of gratitude just now ;

But heavily it sits upon my soul.

'Tis the Princess has saved Oulita. How

I know not.

(*Aloud*)—We are not safe a moment here. They may

Return. Be sure they will return. To Petersburg

Set off to-night. You, Stépan, must take charge

Of her, and we shall follow, though not closely.

Once more, dear love, adieu.

[*He embraces OULITA. Exeunt omnes.*

(*Enter BARON GRÜBNER, followed by a file of Police soldiers.*)

GRÜBNER.

Escaped ! A thousand curses on them ! The

skilless, mindless, inattentive beasts that serve me !
Was anything ever done by any man that was not
wholly done by himself ? followed up throughout by
him ? Henceforth I'll trust no living soul. I'll be
my own spy, my own police, my own executioner.
I will not trust the Czar himself.

(The curtain falls.)

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

A room in the COUNT'S house at St. Petersburg.

COUNT.

The sword hung always over him at feast-time,
Suspended by a hair! It was not much.
I could have learned to smile at that. But if
The one he loved had been in such great peril!
Her danger all his work—and night or day,
At feast or fast, by swords invisible,
Or worse, by spying tongues he was surrounded,
And never felt assured he was alone:
That were a thing to try his sanity;
And yet what is it but to be a king,
And live amidst a Court?—
As some great empty theatre at midnight,
Where e'en the men, who hang the draperies
About the gilded columns, feel the ghastliness,
And shudder while they do their work of shrouding,

So my o'erwearied mind that once so full,
If not of joy, at least of life—

(*Enter STÉPAN.*)

Well, Stépan ?

STÉPAN.

Yes, they are spies, my Lord. On every side
We are invested now. Their house commands
The palace all along the rear.

COUNT.

Indeed !

Whence the mysterious art by which you know,
At the first glance, a spy ?

STÉPAN.

I saw their wives,
And tempted them with merchandise. They
bought—

And are to pay—when spies themselves are paid—
At quarter-day. Said I not right, my Lord ?
The tiniest chip betrays the woodman's path.

COUNT.

Arrange forthwith a corps of counter spies.
Yes, to the last we'll play the play, my friend.
(*Aside*)—Fortune sometimes forsakes the scoundrel
side ;

Sometimes. (*Aloud*)—Look to 't.

[*Exit* STÉPAN.

Still, if there's any wisdom,

Wisdom assured, long hoarded up, 'tis that
Which finds its garb in many nations' proverbs.
Now there is none so savage, none so unversed
In worldly ways, but has some saw like this :
The pitcher to the fountain goes—once—twice—
Thrice—but not always—safely ; or some saying
Dressed in quaint words : how one man may excel
Each fellow-man in mightiest subtlety,
But not a host of men. The world's against us.
We shall be snared at last.

[*Enter* ERMOLAÏ.

Yes, Ermolaï,

We shall be snared at last.

ERMOLAÏ.

Nothing is left

Undone, my Lord, that anxious thought can plan :
Yourself a host, fitted to cope with enemies
Unnumbered.

COUNT.

Seldom 'tis you see beforehand
The foe that is to strike you down—well-armed
Against all else you stand : he aims at you

Behind a friendly face ; pierces your panoply
In that one spot left open in the harness,—
The coward fate ! Nigh dead in me is hope :
Not that with less of force and will I struggle :
Rather the more—this mind discombered from
All flattering hopes.

ERMOLAI.

What of the Czar, my Lord ?

COUNT.

Discreet and cold—the bearing of a man
Who knows of you more than he cares to tell ;
Far more than he can prove. What of the Baron ?

ERMOLAI.

He tried to seem as if he trusted me,
But failed ; and your affairs he had forgotten ;
By which I knew they were of all his thoughts
The uppermost. The Czar was cold ?

COUNT.

He was.

The rescue of a serf would not disturb him.
So far he feels with me ; but to evade
His loved Police, the stay of his great empire
(Thus Grübner vaunts his wretched rabblement),—

This would be almost treason. I can see
The Baron has impressed the Emperor's mind
With all his worst suspicions. 'Tis a plank
Across a foaming torrent that we tread,
Half in the dark, my Ermolaï ; 'twere better
That you should now betray me to the Baron,
And one of us be saved.

ERMOLAÏ.

Never, my Lord.

COUNT.

You are right, I think. Life is not worth such
baseness.

Now for to-night—for once more I must see her.
Dressed as a mujik, following with the men
We have employed about the palace purposely,
At eventime, just when they quit their work,
I'll come upon the quay : there we embark.
Pursuit is far more easily discerned
On the broad bosom of the shadowless Neva
Than in the streets. Close by the bridge we'll
land;—

'Tis not a stone's throw from her house. Till then
Farewell. Stépan goes home at evenings to her,
And still disguised, but as an older man :

What skill and craft there are in him ! Again,
Farewell. So many anxious weary nights
Have made me need repose. [*Exit* COUNT.

ERMOLAIÏ.

Is any woman worth this coil ? Not any—
At least to my poor thinking. Dynasties,
Deep-seated dynasties, we might have changed
With less expenditure of good intrigue.
What waste, wherever woman is concerned,
There is ! I must be true to them. The witch
Enchants me too, though much I do begrudge
The ruin of so great a man, so true
A friend, so fine a scholar, and so apt
A statesman, far above the herd. 'Twas ominous—
The Baron's silence ; like a sheathing of
The claws before the fatal spring.
[*Exit* ERMOLAIÏ.

SCENE II.

Room in'a house at St. Petersburg.

OULITA *working at embroidery.*

OULITA (*sings*).

*The old King sat on his golden throne,
Telling the Queen of his prowess of yore,
While she wove his deeds into tapestry.
The maid of honour was all alone,
Mourning the warriors who come back no more,
And thinking of her own Sir Vasili.
The pages played upon the ground ;
With clank of steel the guard came round.*

I cannot think why my songs are mournful, except that I am happy overmuch. One does not see anybody remain so happy long. Earth would then be heaven,—which it does not appear to be intended to be. Behind my present joy lurks dire apprehension. Faces have peered in at that window, or my fancy brought them there. Men seem to be watching for me at the corners of the streets. If the danger touched me only, I might set the happiness

of this month against a long waste of servitude and misery, and say that my gains were beyond counting : but he—if discovery should destroy him. He swears that he is fearless, and will be scatheless ; yet his eye is not so bright as it was ; and how his heart beat when there was a sudden knocking at the door ! But what a simpleton I am : his terror is for me, as mine for him. I almost wish he would unlove me. From the days of mother Eve to the present time of furbelows and flounces, we women have mostly been the ruin of those we love best. It shall not be so with me. I will know what danger——

[*Enter, suddenly, SMALL WISE MAN.*

OULITA (*starting up with terror*).

What, you here ! Have they found me ? Who is with you ? They shall not drag me away. Edgar, Edgar ! Save me, save me !

SMALL WISE MAN.

There is nothing to fear : I am alone, Oulita. I am your friend. Day and night have I watched to give you one word of warning. I have but now crept through the window on the roof.

OULITA.

I am right then : we are watched.

SMALL WISE MAN.

I do not know—but those who do not love you seem joyous.

OULITA.

Why have they left me alone ?

SMALL WISE MAN.

Have you seen the fowler catch larks ; and do you know what a decoy bird is ? Chirp, chirp, chirp. Will its friends come and see it, and not leave it lonesome—pretty dear ? And then a whistle, and then down comes the net, with more in it than one bird.

OULITA.

And so, at home, they are very bitter against the runaway.

SMALL WISE MAN.

The Prince rages and storms. If the merchant and Oulita should be caught, there would be nothing too bad for either of them. But all his rage exhales in words ; and if the culprits were caught, and they had the finger-ache, he would pity them immensely, and say they had already suffered more than enough. Half his time, and all the good old man's ingenuity, are expended in inventing excuses for not doing any of the violent things he has sworn he would do. His serfs have a happy time.

OULITA.

And the Princess ?

SMALL WISE MAN.

While her father rages, she says nothing ; but there is a crouching look of cruel intent in her eyes which makes my blood run cold. Yet she is great and noble sometimes. There is much struggle going on in her mind—it may be about you. Perhaps she knows the whole truth, of which the Prince knows nothing, and which the Small Wise Man foresaw from the first. Hark you, Oulita ! The Prince, my jester (and the best of the joke is that he takes me to be his) is a dull old dog. I marvel that I endure him. There came, no later than last week, a bag of gold containing fifty thousand roubles. Now the fire was nothing ; so that whoever sent that gold must have valued a certain singing maiden at a higher price than the Jew merchant did. The loss of Mitchka I count at a rouble—and that not a good one. The absence of Vasili Androvitch is a positive gain to the Prince of a thousand roubles a month, for that was about the sum of which he used to defraud his master monthly. But then there was the pleasure of looking over his accounts, which were a miracle of neatness—

the red lines in the right places, and the adding up in kopecks marvellously accurate. Oh, if I were a rogue, how carefully I would look to the adding up of the kopecks, and what remorse I would show if the addition was wrong by a single kopeck. A delicate conscience in kopecks is the thing.

OULITA.

What did the Princess say about the gold?

SMALL WISE MAN.

Nothing. She cannot but smile at me, though, when the old man goes about the house, maundering, and saying, that 'no wonder people pity him; and that some good Christian, hearing of his losses, must have sent him this gold' (rich men's losses excite such tender pity from the world at large!) Oh! 'tis a dull dog. But, like many an old servant, one goes on with him, year after year, because he is such a good-hearted, simple creature. But the palace is as mournful as a pleasure-party in the rain, now that you are away; and the Princess is never in an open passion, and there is nothing to amuse one. I must discharge my jester if things do not mend. I shall die of the disease that kills comfortable people—which the French call 'ennui.'

OULITA.

Does the Count come to see the Princess ?

SMALL WISE MAN.

No. They say, too, that he is in disgrace at Court. The Czar, who was wont to lean upon his arm, and to listen to his wit, passed coldly by him twice at the last reception. This forebodes no good. You should fly further, Oulita : if he loves you, he will not refuse. It is to tell you this, that I have mined my way here through empty houses.

OULITA.

Dear Wisey, are there not many things worse than death ?

SMALL WISE MAN.

I am fond of life,—it is so comical a transaction ; but I can fancy that to some people there may be things worse than death.

OULITA.

You remember what I asked you that evening when I feared the greatest of indignities—that they would make me marry that detestable Vasili. That indeed was dishonour. You remember ?

SMALL WISE MAN.

You wished to test my skill in compounds: you asked for something which would kill—rats.

OULITA.

If ever you have had a kindly feeling for me, I implore you, dear Wisey, to give me some such compound. I will swear not to use it except for some great occasion, and to avoid some exceeding indignity.

SMALL WISE MAN.

I dare not, for your sake, come hither again. I am such a personable man, that other men do note me.

OULITA.

No; but if I were to see you anywhere, and should touch my forehead—so, you are to know that it would much befriend me—more deeply than words could signify—to enable me to kill a rat. Swiftly, suddenly, this rat must die.

SMALL WISE MAN.

I'll think on it. There are things worse than death—yes, there are. You will not seek death to escape from mere pain: you are too brave a girl for that, Oulita.

OULITA.

I am too happy. There was a time I would have died to escape the shame of being scourged; but now I have too much past happiness to think of, ever to be very miserable.

SMALL WISE MAN.

If it be a last resource, I will aid you; but I must see the danger myself, and judge of it. It was an old Roman fashion for a friend—but you know nothing about Romans, and we waste time. I must get up into my hiding-place, and be off. Farewell, Oulita.

[*Exit* SMALL WISE MAN.]

OULITA.

The Czar passed by him twice: and his dear fame
His noble hopes—a wealth of public good—
For much he loves the oppressed,—nay more, far
more,

His life's at stake—all for a thing like me.
It shall not be. We lure them to destruction:
Thus speak the common herd of men. But, no.
He can be saved—he shall. My graceful mistress,
Once so endeared to me, and still so loveable,
May all her wrath exhaust on me. What's torture?

Amidst the keenest sufferings they dare inflict,
Of that first kiss he gave me when I fled,
I'll think, triumphant over present agony.
Shall malefactors on the rack keep silence,
True to the partners in their crimes; and women,
More fitted to endure all passive suffering—
Shall we be forced to criminate the man
We love? (*Seizing a light*). I'll hold my hand in
this to prove

What I can bear. But, no; I shall want all
My fortitude. This very night I'll do it.
It must be done forthwith. Pardon me, Edgar,
And, oh, ye powers in Heaven, if aught benign
Regard this earth, let it not be too late.—
But I must see him once again—once only.
Yes, for the last time, see him—the very last.
Oh, what a flood of misery lies concealed
In that word 'last'!

(*Enter the COUNT.*)

Well, truant, you are come at last.

(*Aside*) The word 'last' haunts me now. (*Aloud*)

You shut us up,

And say those pretty birds sing best when caged,
Fluttering their foolish wings against the wires,
Breaking their hearts to see again their captors.

Most silly creatures, women, are they not, dear ?
You told me Mahomet said they had no souls.
The prophet never loved, I trow.

COUNT.

He thought

He did.

OULITA.

'Tis a mistake that men have often made.
Come hither, love. Why I declare there's one
Grey hair.

COUNT.

You foolish, flattering girl, for one
Say hundreds. Yes—

OULITA.

And a wise man like you,
Who must have seen, and thought, and travelled
much,
Can love a foolish girl like me ; can let
That love consume your precious life. 'Tis weak,
'Tis passing weak. With all your wondrous lore
You have not yet found out the height of mischief
We are to you—we women : yes, my Edgar,
Mischief—
A most seducing poison are our kisses.
You must have read about the famed Dalilah.

There may be innocent Dalilahs, not
The less pernicious though—mayhap the more so.
He should rejoice—at least, he should not grieve
Too much, if any blessed hap relieved
This Samson of his dangerous bewilderer,
Before his locks be shorn.

COUNT.

What means this talk ?

OULITA.

Girls will have fancies, dear ; and 'tis not strange,
When much alone and musing on their fate,
That they should turn that wondrous medal, love,
And gaze on the reverse. But hark ! what noise
Is this ?

COUNT.

The sighing of the jealous wind,
Which may not enter in this charmèd room,
And kiss those golden locks.

OULITA.

Prettily turned—
A bright conceit. But, hark again !

COUNT.

'Tis nothing.

Why, girl, you used to be a paragon
Of fearlessness. Now, like an aged woman
In a lone house, that hears great noises made
By mice behind the wainscot, shuddering draws
The clothes about her head, expecting murder—
You shrink and shiver when there's nought to fear.
And this is my Oulita? like an aspen,
White-leaved, that quivers in the faintest breeze,
While all the other forest trees remain
Majestically still.

OULITA.

Not for myself;

I am beyond all fear. (*Aside*) In misery too deep
For such a shallow thing as fear to reach me.
(*Aloud*) Say, shall I sing a song of the olden time?

COUNT.

You know I love to hear you.

OULITA (*sings*).

*Forty-three went down the river,
Singing merrily, singing merrily;
Twenty-three came up the river,
Singing merrily, singing merrily.*

*The chief stepped on shore: in his blood-red hand
What was once a banner he joyously waved,*

*A fluttering rag—'tis the enemy's flag;
Our own in the deep with the bearer is saved.
Forty-three, &c.*

*The young men with envy, the old men with praise,
The maidens with smiles, and the mothers with joy,
Welcome the living; the little boys raise
A shout to the welkin (for to shout loves a boy).
Forty-three, &c.*

*This feat, like many, had been lost to fame,
Forgotten soon, but for a poet's lay—
Forgotten by the shouting crowd, at least,
But twenty mothers ever mourned the day.
Forty-three, &c.*

COUNT.

Nay, dear, sing something resonant and joyous.
It is so easy to make men unhappy;
And life is sad enough.

OULITA.

You, too, are sad then ?
And now I look upon your face, the lines
Are deepening fast. (*Aside*) I'm strengthened in my
purpose.

(*Aloud*) You said, when last you came, you would
resume

The story of your wanderings : know, I'm jealous,
When oft I think of all the happy regions
Your face has blessed,—jealous of rocks and streams,
Jealous of fond, imaginary nymphs
That you have met beside those streams. Is't not
so ?—

Jealous of the pale moon you've looked at fondly
On many a gorgeous night in southern seas.
You have so looked, Sir. Knowing all my folly,
You will not say, whatever happens, dearest,
I did not love you. That you promise me.

COUNT.

I do. Where was I in my tiresome story ?
I told you of the stillness in the North
Bewitched in ice ; and then we wandered towards
The joyous, noisy South, where the perfume
Of orange-groves pervades the charmed air,
And overcomes the incense in the temples ;
And where the yellow rocks uprise from out
A tideless sea that purples as you gaze,
And seems like the unreal waters of enchantment
You read of in a magic tale—that might,

Some potent word pronounced, vanish away.
And then I told you of a bay of sand,
Quite black—like crumbled memories of a life
All spent in sorrow—so it seemed to me
As I dismounted, and the hours went by,
Leaving me gazing at this ebon shore,
On which the calm blue ripple, like a lizard
Up a dark wall, stole softly : then, to Africa
We sailed, and in the desert drew that breath
So full, so deep, that ever afterwards
There is a sense of stifling in grand palaces,
When we recall our sojourn 'midst the sand,
And see again brown camels moored about
Our tent, and watch the all-pervading sunset—
One fiery dome—the north, the east, the south,
Reddening alike, nor leaving to the west
Alone the duty-task of shining out
In regal pomp—when the fierce king of day
Takes leave of all the courtly hemisphere
At once—a sunset wholly inconceivable
To those who dwell in pallid Russia.

OULITA.

Oh, would I had been with you in that tent!

COUNT.

And how at the big stars we gazed, and wondered
That men could e'er be cruel to each other,
Having that sky to look upon, and all
That it may mean to interpret. Then to Italy
Again we came. The scene in these fair realms,
Fair and yet ghastly, faded yet so grand,
That haunts my memory most, haunts and disgusts,
Like some fierce, wicked face, seen once in a crowd,
That will obtrude its unblest recollection,
And will not bide dismissal ; it is this.
Amidst the hills there lies an oval valley,
Not shaped by Nature, but man's work—all man's.
From base to summit curving lines ascend
Of granite steps. The curious traveller notes
The tiny channels in the time-worn blocks,
Designed to drain away the passing showers,
That great provincial dames might sit in comfort.
Four arched and barred recesses, treasure caves
(Not for a moment were those bars unwatched
By the avaricious eyes of countless thousands)
Contained the hoarded mass of human misery,
And bestial suffering, chosen to delight
The pampered multitude pining for blood.
See ! the Proconsul comes.

The hushed spectators draw a lower breath,
And wait, with palpitating joy, the rush
Of beasts, which are to tear their fellow-men ;
Or, peevish at some wearisome delay,
Denounce the meanness of patricians now-a-days,
And moralize upon the scarcity
Of lions, praising much the good old times,
When gladiators died more freely.

OULITA.

Serfs ?

THE COUNT.

Not always serfs. There, too, I lingered long,
And dreadful thoughts of men besieged my heart :
They call the place Verona.

OULITA.

A famous city !

I've heard of it.

THE COUNT.

And now, departed all,
Proconsuls, lions, gladiators, slaves,—
A wooden stage, and painted daubs hung out
Of dancing girls, such as attract the boors
At festivals, betray the conquering march
Of a new creed that makes account of men :

Strange emblems these, but most indicative
Of such a glorious conquest. Then, sweet love,
We came to Venice—Venice dear to every one
Whose gracious star has led him to behold her ;
So dear that in the memory she remains,
Like an old love, who would, indeed, have been
Our only love, but died, and all the past
Is full of her untried perfections, while
Amidst the unknown recesses of our hearts
Enthroned she sits, in tenderest mist of thought,
Like the soft brilliancy of autumn haze,
Seen at the setting of the sun : and such
Is Venice—to repeat her name is sweet,
Just as I love to say the word ‘Oulita.’
And then of the dark, swanlike gondolas
We talked ; and how, ’midst crumbling palaces,
Great churches, richly inlaid mosques and columns,
Each step an ample field for history,
And under bridges mossed with dripping sea-weed
(A thousand silvery lights reflected from
The rippling waters, upwards on the arches
Playing fondly, like glad insects in the sun),
The dark-clad gondola went gurgling by—
Its inmate lost in sweetest meditation—
Went gurgling by—went gurgling—

OULITA.

Hist ! a noise,

And steps advancing—stay a moment, dearest

[*Exit* OULITA.]

COUNT.

The girl is mad with foolish apprehension ;
While I, the mind and body both o'ercome,
Numbed with fatigue, feel nothing : and my life
In this, its utmost agony and terror,
As some great scene enacted at a play,
Unrolls itself before me sunk in listlessness,
And wrapped in meaningless serenity,
A mere spectator, weary and yet soothed,
While with accustomed pomp high tragic woes,
In lingering strains of heavenliest melody
Expressed, sweep on majestically.

[*The COUNT falls asleep.*

(Re-enter OULITA.)

OULITA.

'Twas nothing, love, nothing ; I am indeed
The silly aspen, you the oak :—he sleeps :
How calm he looks, and beautiful as Death ;
The old composure once again restored,
That grace of conscious dignity which made

Beholders think he just had laid aside
His crown, so fitted seemed that brow for empire.
He told me once how little he was prone
To sleep ; but care for me has over-tasked
His soul. Sleep, dearest, sleep ; and wake,
If not to happiness, at least to freedom.

[*She begins to write.*

COUNT (*awaking*).

The while the gondolier sang some old song,
The ever-new old story of great love ;
And still the dark-clad thing went gurgling by—
Yes, ever-new and yet so old.—The Baron—
That Grübner— [*Drops off to sleep again.*

OULITA (*finishes writing*).

He must forgive me ; still the words seem cruel.
Women have left the men they love—the men
Who loved them—on some miserable pique,
Some touch of vanity, mere vanity.—
I pity them. What must such women feel ?
This gorgeous robe became the Count's adored one,
Not the repentant serf. My peasant dress—
I'll go in that. He loved me first in that.

[*Exit, and returns with her former
clothes in her hand. She begins to
take off her fine dress.*

COUNT (*half-awaking*).

Great Czar, my good liege Lord, did you but know
her,

You'd pardon all.—Where were we then, Oulita ?

OULITA.

We were at Venice.

COUNT.

Yes, where the boat sped on
Amidst the islands clothed with fanes and convents,
That gleamed i' the sea, athwart the evening sun,
Like some great rubies on a fair white hand :
And evermore the strains of Tasso—evermore
The plash of waves, the measured beat of oars,
Lulling to rest, and lulling evermore.

[*Falls into a deep sleep.*

OULITA.

It must be done at once.

(*She throws down her peasant dress.*)

What is that noise ?

Oh for a kiss that should contain one's life
Here and hereafter :—no, it must be soft,
And, like a mother's to a sickly child,
Must soothe, not wake.

(*She kisses his hand, and then his dress.*

Kneels.)

Oh God, sustain me now.

For his dear sake sustain my sinking heart.

(*Rises*) Dear room, the witness of such happy hours,
Adieu—again one kiss—adieu !

[*She rushes from the room. Slow music.*]

SCENE III.

Bedroom in PRINCE LANSKOF'S Palace at St. Petersburg. The PRINCESS MARIE sitting at a table, reading. She rises and walks about.

PRINCESS (*reading*).

'The jealous person is insane, without the excuse of disease for his or her insanity. This love that you would have, can the loved person give it to you? Is it his or hers to give? Are you prepared to exchange your love in return for another's love, or out of mere gratitude? Love moves in higher spheres than to be compelled by any motives short of necessity. Those whom you love you must love; and jealousy is like the crying of a child for the moon, which the nurse may promise to give it, and thus may soothe the child to

sleep ; but the moon has not yet been given away by any of the nurses who have promised to give it.'

Oh Lord ! how wise these same philosophers
Appear in books. I'd like to see you, Sir,

(Throws down the book)

Yourself in love with some capricious beauty ;
Forgetting all your measured sentences,
Dragging your frigid wisdom in the dirt,
To follow at her heels who heeds you not,
Except to laugh at, while she doats upon
Some smooth-faced, empty, curly-pated blockhead.
Yes, Sir *(stamps upon the book)*, say then, 'those
whom you love you must love,
And jealousy is like the crying of a child.'
Do I not know the folly of it all,
And did I need your trash to enlighten me ?
These maxim-mongers tell us of our folly,
And think that they have found out consolation.

[Walks up to the glass.

Am I not beautiful as she—more beautiful ?
Would she were here, I'd tear her beauty from her.
But no ; I'll not be mean or small—the Count
Pronounced me great,—the vengeance I will take,
If there be any vengeance, shall be noble :

And yet I hate Oulita—how I hate her !
All in a day ;—’twas but one day he saw her.
What men can find in these insipid women !
But that they hope to guide them utterly,
And be prince-paramounts, supremely worshipped :
And mostly they’re deceived ; that’s some delight,
And ’tis the quiet, mouse-like woman dominates.
There, maxim-monger, there’s a hint for you.

[*Kicks the book.*

Make much of it ;—
I knew the marriage was political,
And that he cared not aught for me. ’Tis true
He was a slighting lover, most polite,
Nor dreamed that I loved him. But why this girl ?
What can he see in her ? They say we women
Have little understanding of each other :
But, to adore a miserable serf,
And listen to her trumpery warbling stuff,
As if ’twere something quite above humanity.—
He liked not ‘singsong :’ no, deceitful man !
I’d tear her tongue out. Would I were her equal,
And, like a man, could meet her in the lists,
Where one of us must die !

[*Enter OULITA, who walks up to the
PRINCESS, and kneels at her feet.*

Is it a spectre,
My teeming thought made flesh ? But no ;
(*Looking down at her*)
There's here
The same sustained, soft, deprecating look,
Well known to me,—but too well known, that seems
As if it feared rebuke, but yet was strong
In matchless insincerity, and knew
Its boundless powers of duping.—Speak, girl ! Art
dumb ?

I wish you had been : maledictions on you !
Great Princess, richly-robed, explain your presence.

OULITA.

Madam, an outcast girl implores the pardon
She dares not hope for.

PRINCESS.

Ha ! He has left you then :

And you return, in those becoming robes,
To penitence and virtue ;—rather late,
Methinks.

Speak, girl, unless you wish me to call Mitchka.
Mitchka is dead, you think ; there lives another.
Say, has the Count forsaken you ?

OULITA (*rising*).

The Count!

What Count?

PRINCESS.

Why this surpasses patience! What Count,
minx,—

That Count who was to be my husband, wretch;
That Count who, to his eminent dishonour,
Stole you away;—set fire to his friend's palace;—
Slew that friend's servants;—decked you out, great
lady,

In this fine garb;—who broke his plighted word
For you;—the Count von Straubenheim.

OULITA.

You know, then?

PRINCESS.

There is no thread of his and your intrigues
Unknown to me. He told me of your love.

OULITA.

Permit me now to speak. Of a return,
You spoke, to virtue. There is no return.
A woman might have thought more charitably
Of any sister-woman, though a serf:

Madam, there's no return, I say, to virtue,
And none to penitence, though much to sorrow.
I loved the Count, 'tis true, yet not to love
I fled, but to escape a shame one maiden
Should hardly have inflicted on another.
I saw the Count again. I listened—who
Would not?—to his fond words and vows repeated
To make this slave in other climes his wife.
But soon the bloodhounds were upon the track ;
I heard, or seemed to hear, the avenger's baying ;
Marked the ignoble lines of care—his care
For me—indenting that majestic brow :
'Twas then that I divined his danger, sought
To save his life, myself surrendering
To all your sternest cruelty might do.
I am too late, and am prepared to bear
The now most thriftless, useless penalty.
But hear : men are most wayward in their fancies ;
He should have worshiped at your shrine, great
Princess.
Perhaps it was your very excellence
Made him decline to such a thing as me.
He ever spoke of you with tenderest homage.

PRINCESS.

He did ?

OULITA.

He did ; and one there was who sat
beside him,
Who joyed to hear your praises, for the Count
Said ever you were most magnanimous,—
Great as a foe, and splendid as a friend.

PRINCESS.

And nothing else, the while he played with those
Fair tresses, said the Count ?—nothing about
My furious temper, and the difference 'twixt
Mine and the soft Oulita's,—nothing, girl ?
Sealing his pretty sayings with a kiss—
The false, the perjured man.

OULITA.

Not false, nor perjured,

PRINCESS.

Ah, now we stir the meek one.

OULITA.

What he said

In rare disparagement of your great charms,
Was such indeed as might make any woman
Desire the more to win the man who said it.—

By that dread suffering image * that looks down
On us this moment, I would die to win
His love for you; would worm myself into
His heart, to find an entrance there for you,
And thus ensure his safety and your joy :
That safety being—for I'll not deceive you,—
The chiefest aim in life for me. Dear Princess—

(*Puts her arm round the PRINCESS*)

You used to let me call you dear,—be true
To your great mind. Let's set our women's wits
To work, to make the man love you. There only
His safety lies—and there his happiness.
'Tis you alone are worthy of the Count.
With you to aid his plans, to fix his purposes,
Partake success with him, console in failure,
Cheering with your bright wit his melancholy,
He will become the greatest man in Russia.

PRINCESS.

How blind is pride! The Count was right, Oulita,
Were I a man I should have loved you best.
Save him we will, but not for me, Oulita.

* In every Russian room there is an image of some saint, called an *obraz*. See HARRISON'S *Nine Years' Residence in Russia*, p. 140.

I am not worthy of him, nor of you.

Nay, let me kneel to you. Could you but know
What savage thoughts I've had, you ne'er could
love me.

Let me but kiss—that shudder was not wickedness,—
I do not grudge his fondness for that cheek.

I meant that I must love what he had loved,
And I do love it—(*kisses her*). We'll rest together,
dear,

And early morn shall find us planning rescue.

His peril is most urgent. I did not

Betray him; nay, I saved him once. Your Marie
Was not in all things bad,—not always wicked.

Ah, could you but have known, that fatal day
My heedless passion threatened you with stripes—

(*Puts her hand before her eyes*)

I am ashamed to look at you, and say

The base word stripes,—could you have known how
tenderly

I felt to you, never so much before,

And how I roamed and roamed about in agony,

Contriving some excuse to make you ask

Your pardon, and none came, you must, you would
Have pitied me.

Down at your feet I could have humbly knelt,

Imploring you to kneel at mine, Oulita ;
Indeed I could. But then my odious pride
Stiffened my soul again.

OULITA.

But more, you say,
Than ever, then, you loved your own Oulita.

PRINCESS.

What is the worth of my love that could do
So little battle with my pride ?

OULITA.

We poor ones,
Who from our infancy are curbed and bent,
And bounded in, know little of the pangs
The great endure in mastering their pride
Long-seated, deep-engrained.

PRINCESS.

Generous Oulita,
Always some foolish, fond excuse for me.
I almost feel I love the Count the more
For being wise and great enough to love thee,
Discerning thy rare qualities beneath
The sorry mask of serfdom.

The world would scarce believe its mocking eyes
If it could see two women loving madly
One man, and yet the fonder of each other.
Is it not so, Oulita?

OULITA.

Dearest, it is.

PRINCESS.

Not *dearest*, I must tell the Count if you
Say that fond word to any other soul.

[OULITA *hides her head on the PRINCESS's*
breast. They embrace ;—then kneel
before the image in the corner of the
room. The curtain falls.

ACT V.

SCENE I.

Room in a house at St. Petersburg.

COUNT *sleeping.*

COUNT (*awaking*).

No, no; you cannot touch me here. Avaunt!
—'Tis but a dream! But what a dream! The
Florentine,
Whose poems are the light wherein remorse,
While cowering o'er the ashes of the past,
Reads back its history—He might have dreamed
A dream like that. Let me recall its horrors.
'Twas lost on me; a great possession, though,
For some wild poet: underneath a tree,
Fair as the trees that border upon Palestine,
I slept; the branches, every one of them,
Their stained bark swelling with larger life
Than plants can claim, grew into spotted serpents,

Lithely they hung, and waved, and writhed, and
curled,

And still it was a tree. At last they saw me;
And every forkèd tongue dipped, hissing, down-
wards,

And still it was a tree—Oulita, come !

Where are you, love ? I will not tell it to her.

But what is this—‘ The Count von Straubenheim ’—

Her hand :— (*Reads the letter*)

*‘ Forgive me. I fly from you. Forgive me. I
must not drag you down to destruction. Do not quite
forget your Oulita. One last request I make : never
let it be known that you aided me in my escape. Let me
not suffer, and yet fail to save you. I am, for ever
and for ever, yours,*

OULITA.’

COUNT.

’Tis clear enough : the worst has come.

[*Enter* ERMOLAÏ.

ERMOLAÏ.

They are upon you ; nothing left for me,
Dear Count, but to partake in the betrayal,
And so preserve myself to aid you further.
I come, a spy, to gain your arms, if possible.

COUNT (*aside*).

I could dispense with life,—a poor device though,
A wicked skulking out of Fortune's way
When that fair lady frowns. I've ever scorned it.
(*To ERMOLAÏ*) Here are my arms. They will your
vouchers be
That you are Grübner's man.

[*ERMOLAÏ gives a signal from the window. The Police enter—and in the rear comes BARON GRÜBNER, in full dress.*

COUNT.

Ha ! Baron, you have left the ball, I see ;
Now some fair lady must be miserable.

BARON GRÜBNER.

Pray, Count, gibe on, gibe on :—‘the last who
laughs’—
You know the proverb. Now you must confess
That the Police are not at all times useless.
There is some need of government in Russia.

COUNT.

Yes, Sir, of government ; but, pardon me,
I do not call your functions ‘governing.’

You've beaten me: there is not much in that.
I've played the game, perhaps, as well as you;—
The nature of most things, and of most men,
Is on the side of scoundrelism. For once, now,
Only for once—just for the love of change,
Try one good action, save one innocent
From high injustice—all power on the other side,—
And let me be the Baron Grübner—why,
Three months—three days, I'll bring your virtue
home

To you, and hang you for your one good action.
Three months I've had. And you with that base spy
(*Pointing out ERMOLAÏ*)

Nicely ensconced, it seems, close by my side,
To watch and to report each trivial action,—
Look, Baron, at the odds against me.

BARON GRÜBNER.

I trust you will explain these pleasantries,
And prove your wit, if not your innocence,
Before the Czar.

[*To the Police.*

Lead on.

[*Exeunt omnes.*

SCENE II.

Hall in PRINCE LANSKOF'S house at St. Petersburg.

Enter the SMALL WISE MAN.

SMALL WISE MAN.

It is a scandal : it is a calumny : it is an assertion made by most men ; and it is therefore untrue. They say that we little humpbacks are always malignant,—that, in this little pack here, we have a store of bitter wares,—that other people's misfortunes are merriment to us. You big, round, slanderous rascal, called 'the world,' I give you the lie, Sir, in your teeth. Why, even to you I wish some good, you villain.

Now I would that the Prince were as firm and as wise as he is kind-hearted ; I would that the Princess were as gentle as she is great-hearted ; I would that Oulita were—a thousand miles away—even in foggy England. And, above all, I would that I were a tall straight fellow, ten years younger, and that Oulita—oh, you silly little man—you are ashamed to finish the sentence even in the presence of bare walls. But

why give us hearts? It was a mistake.

[*Enter OULITA.*

What you here?—mad, mad you must be—away!

[*He tries to drag her off.*

Hide anywhere but here.

OULITA.

I have returned
To stay: and have been through the house to find
you.

SMALL WISE MAN.

The Princess knows?

OULITA.

She does. You recollect
What I implored when last I saw you.

SMALL WISE MAN.

Rats!—

Must they be killed? I almost think I'll do't.
I cannot bear to have you tortured.

OULITA.

Fear not.

That danger's over, but a greater one
Appears.

(*She kneels at his feet*)

If ever you have had a thought
For poor Oulita kinder than the thoughts
You waste upon the general crowd, dear Wisey,
Grant my request. Believe me, life is now
So dear—each leisure moment amply filled
With happy thoughts, that your reluctance would
Be nought compared to mine, if I should quit
This radiant world.

SMALL WISE MAN (*sighing*).

Indeed, poor bird, so happy.
What an invention, love! I think I 'gin
To hate the world—no love for me in it!

OULITA.

I dare not stay. Give it or give it not,
It is the only boon I ever asked you,—
'Tis honour, life (aye, life), hope, power, to me.
You have it here: I heard you once exclaim
You always were prepared; and being miserable—
For I was miserable then,—I knew
What those words meant. Refuse me now, and
nevermore
I waste a thought on thee again.

[*He takes something from his breast, and
gives it to her.*]

SMALL WISE MAN.

They're all

Alike. A fell wild animal exists
In every woman, only some conceal
The tigress breed in them—and smile, and purr,
And rub against us with their sleek soft fur.
The other one's the milder of the two.
Give it me back !

OULITA.

No ; but be comforted,
My most dear friend ; I may not need to use it.
But if I should, I must know how—indeed,
I must—
(*He makes a gesture, as if rubbing something across his lips.*)

OULITA.

How many minutes afterwards—
Will the rat live ?

SMALL WISE MAN.

Three. But think, Oulita, think
Of my remorse. Promise me this. Before
You use this fatal gift of mine, bring back—
Bring clearly back—to a calm mind, the days
When first your mother's smile was dear, when first

She trusted to your care your little brother,
And anxiously the little nurse upheld
The child, as you both strayed beside the stream—
(I've often wandered there)—which marked your
garden,
To you a world of waters ; then your father,
The ponderous man, laid his large hand upon
Your head, saying you were his wise Oulita.
Then think, was this the end for which they toiled,
And if, on thinking thus, you can resolve
In one rash moment to obliterate
What they so prized—why then God's blessing on
you.
I can say nothing more.

OULITA.

I promise you
The well-loved early days most faithfully
To mirror back upon my soul before
I use your loving gift. Adieu ! I promise.

[*Exit* OULITA.]

SMALL WISE MAN.

There is no wisdom left in me.—Against
My better will I yield to that embodiment

Of soft, yet fierce, determination.
Are all men equally the slaves of women,
Or does she play upon my friendlessness?
And as of woman-born she—she alone—
Indulges me with gracious words, most weakly
I let her lure me to allow her own
Destruction—nay, prepare her death myself—
I am a miserable wretch. Oulita!
But no : I must not call her back.

[*Exit* SMALL WISE MAN.]

SCENE III.

Room in the EMPEROR OF RUSSIA'S Palace.

The EMPEROR and BARON GRÜBNER.

EMPEROR.

Baron, you cannot say that I give heed
To private feelings. No : of all my court
This was the man who was the best companion.
When I compared him with most other men,
Like some calm lake he seemed, whose fondling
waters
Have stolen in upon the yielding earth,

In curves of unimaginable loveliness,
Fantastic, graceful, soft, Nature's own doing,
The work of harmonising elements;
While other men's indented natures show
The outlines harsh of artificial waters.
You shrug your shoulders. Well, 'tis fanciful.
And then he was—which is not fancy—Baron,
The truest friend—(*aside*) perhaps my only one;—
(*Aloud*) He has not sought to move me—ever
great
In all his doings was the Count.

BARON GRÜBNER.

Great crimes.

EMPEROR.

'Tis true: I can't gainsay it. But you, Baron,
You hate him.

BARON GRÜBNER.

Not the man—his theories,
Abundantly. You see, my liege, to what
These lead. Such men, they talk and talk of govern-
ment,—
And were they once in power would not be bloodless;
Or if they were, the State would go to wrack,
And they, themselves,—

EMPEROR.

He has already gone !

Siberia has another great man.—Baron,

You are quick, methinks.

BARON GRÜBNER.

For him, for you, my liege,

For all his friends, this speed was merciful.

The orders were precise your Majesty

Was pleased to give : delay is not my practice.

If aught occurs to move your Majesty

In his behalf, there's time : they travel slowly.

Not wishing ever to obstruct my Sovereign

In mercy's great prerogative, I fail

To see the narrowest loophole in this case.

The Czar has power—

EMPEROR.

To spare great criminals,

And so commit injustice : yes, we know

What you would say. How far our powers extend

Is not unknown to us. The ample latitude

That to our sway belongs, with fewer scruples—

No, but with more—afflicts our inmost soul—

By reason of its amplitude.

BARON GRÜBNER.

I grieve

To see your Majesty so moved.

EMPEROR.

You, Baron,

Have made yourself a portion of the State—

Of something not alive. You are an older man,

More versed in state affairs: I, too, shall harden,

But slowly. Leave the other papers.

(Exit BARON GRÜBNER.)

They think we do not feel these things—not feel
them!—

We who indulge so rarely in great friendships!

Oh, the stupidity of men in love!

Here has he weltered in a slough of crime;

Plunging head foremost, hotly chased by enemies

Whom his free tongue, he must have known, had
bred.

Let him have come to me at first, the idiot—

Idiot! The shrewdest man I ever knew.

Confound the slave!—the girl.

[Enter an OFFICER.]

OFFICER.

A serf—a girl, who will not be gainsaid,

Implores your Majesty to give her audience.

THE EMPEROR.

Why, man, you have been palace door-keeper
For twenty years ;—should know that doors will
shut,

And yet you talk of ‘will not be gainsaid.’

A girl !—The world is crazed with girls.

OFFICER.

She’d kill

Herself, she said, did I not give her message.

I saw she would, too, please your Majesty.

THE EMPEROR.

Admit her. You’re a gentle-hearted man
To keep a door. You may be gentle-hearted—

(Exit OFFICER)

But I must be above it: now this girl
Will something want that ought not to be done,
Upon my conscience to be thrown—

(Enter OFFICER with OULITA.)

(Exit OFFICER.)

Now, Beauty ! what impossibility
Have you come for ?—your Czar must do’t, per-
force.

OULITA.

He must.

THE EMPEROR.

No doubt he must. But stay,—

(*aside*) there's agony

In that sweet face, I will not jest with her—

(*Aloud*) your name?

OULITA.

Oulita.

THE EMPEROR.

A name to me most ominous.

My dearest friend is lost through an 'Oulita.'

I hate the name.

OULITA.

I hate it, too; and her

No less. I wish she never had been born.

THE EMPEROR.

You do?—(*aside*) some rival I dare swear. The

name

Is fatal to the Count.

OULITA.

I am Prince Lanskof's serf: the Count von Strauben-
heim

Saw me, and loved me.—

THE EMPEROR.

Then, 'tis she. Come hither.

(He holds her hands and looks into her face)

Yes, you are beautiful ; pernicious Beauty !

But still, our court is not so poor in charms,

That this should drive a wise man wild ;—a serf
too !—

(Aside) I cannot see the charm of ignorance.—

(Aloud) In the old times they would have said
'twas witchcraft.

OULITA.

Men greater than the Count, where they should not,
Have loved.

*[The CZAR lets go her hands, and slightly
pushes her from him.]*

THE EMPEROR.

Most insolent !

OULITA.

Most true, great Czar

If the breeze move the highest tree in all

The wood, men mark that tree, and know which way

The wind blows.

THE EMPEROR.

Yes, we're well aware our subjects
Are kind enough to heed our slightest movements.
It was reserved for a serf-girl to tell us
What the world saw, but did not dare to speak of.
Come here again,—
(Takes her as he did before)
Why the Count loved you, girl,
I partly see. You are as bold as he is.
But tell not in the streets you braved us thus.
The Baron Grübner might not like to hear it—
The Chief of our Police. Proceed.
[He puts her from him.]

OULITA.

He swore

To gain my freedom, and the Count is not
A man to break his word. They ordered punish-
ment:

The Count would not brook this, or have the one
He loved profaned by scourging; and he saved me.

THE EMPEROR.

Arson and murder;—but he kept his word.

OULITA.

Not murder—a fair fight; the hideous slave

He killed fought with him, then did God protect
The right.

THE EMPEROR.

Killed fairly, say you ?

OULITA.

Yes, killed fairly :

Mitchka drew first, my liege.

THE EMPEROR.

Prince Lanskof's man ?

OULITA.

Man—executioner !

THE EMPEROR.

But he drew first ?

OULITA.

He did. The Count, so please your Majesty,
Is not so poor in spirit, or in purse,
As not to build again what he destroyed.
Indeed it is already done—the loss,
I mean, most faithfully restored. But now,
Great Czar, to come right into the heart of things,
(*Aside*) How much I steal his words !—(*Aloud*)
Permit one question.

And on your answer I will stake my fate.
My liege, if that most beauteous Countess, whom
The wicked world——

THE EMPEROR.

Nay, girl, it is not generous
To urge me thus ; and you may rouse my anger.

OULITA.

I am beyond all fear, and you must hear me.
If she were sentenced to be scourged by Mitchka,
To hear the jests of a coarse crowd ; say, now,
Of envious lords, or still more envious ladies,
While shrinking flesh rose upwards to the scourge
In livid agony——

THE EMPEROR.

No more——

OULITA.

And he who loved her

Set fire to an imperial town, to save
The beauteous dame from such indignity.
Well, I, for one, should not esteem the less
The Czar, her lover, though the town was burnt,
Should you, Sire ?

THE EMPEROR.

By Heaven, you are the most audacious girl
In my dominions. You wish to follow him?
Come to the point.

OULITA.

No, not to follow him :
To gain his pardon, and to wed him to
The Princess Marie.

THE EMPEROR.

Your rival? For in truth
Such may the Princess call you, nor demean
Herself——

OULITA.

Her he must wed. The state demands
His services.

THE EMPEROR.

It does ; and I demand
My friend. All might be hushed, the Count—but
stay,
What says the Princess? Not for worlds, I fear,
Will that proud woman wed the man (forgive me)
Who once loved you, and scorned her love,—the
ridicule !

OULITA.

She will.

THE EMPEROR.

I doubt. And then her haughty father.

We cannot hope it ; and, without her aid,
Unless I stretch my power beyond all bounds,
Which I will not, he perishes. Ask me
Some other boon, whate'er you please, but ask
Not this—it cannot be ; he would despise me.
Besides, he'll not wed her. You know him well ;
But I, fair maiden, am the older, though
The less-loved friend. He will not do't.

OULITA.

He must.

I will persuade him.

THE EMPEROR.

But her.

OULITA.

She came with me,

And now, if I know aught of woman's love,
Is sick with fear, and hot with quivering hope,
Watching the minutes pass, and wondering much
Why you detain me. Not in woman's dress ;
As a young page disguised she came.

[*The EMPEROR rings a bell on the table.*

Enter OFFICER.

THE EMPEROR.

Bid the youth enter who accompanied

This girl. (*Exit OFFICER.*)

And so the Princess was ashamed—

(Enter the SMALL WISE MAN, with the Officer.)

OULITA.

No, no! not you, dear Wisey.

THE EMPEROR.

Ha! the dwarf,

Prince Lanskof's dwarf. No, stay: *(aside)* another witness.

(Aloud) We've passed some jokes together, dwarf.

SMALL WISE MAN.

Your Majesty was pleased to think them jokes, and very good jesting it was for a Czar. One could not make a living by it, though.

THE EMPEROR.

Come hither, sir! *(Takes him apart.)* You dwarfs are cognisant

Of all that passes in your masters' houses:

You're spies, advisers—

SMALL WISE MAN.

And sometimes, so please your Majesty, prime ministers—a mixture of the two.

THE EMPEROR.

Tell me the truth of this sad tale. Be brief,
No lies with me, sirrah—your head the forfeit.
And first the Count—what is't of him you know?

SMALL WISE MAN.

The Count is a great man, but he fell in love with that girl in the mad, break-neck way that belongs to middle-aged men, when they do make that deplorable tumble; and he committed a few irregularities.

THE EMPEROR (*angrily*).

Irregularities!

SMALL WISE MAN.

That is the word for great men's crimes, for those of great Czars, renowned Julius Cæsars, Ivans the Terrible, Peters the Great, and birds of that high plumage—that sanguinary feather, if I may say so.

THE EMPEROR.

They're all alike, steeped in audacity!

SMALL WISE MAN.

A man must be judged by his kind ; and the reason we seldom know anything of great men is, that they are chattered of, and scribbled about, by small men. If your Majesty will deign to hear a serious word from a poor dwarf, I would not cut off my right hand, if I were you, because of a small fault, the other members of the body politic not being quite impeccable themselves.

THE EMPEROR.

A murder, man !

SMALL WISE MAN.

Had your liege known Mitchka, you would have said he was the one amongst your millions whom you could best have spared.

THE EMPEROR.

What of this girl, Oulita ?

SMALL WISE MAN.

An' she were not a thought too worldly-wise (has picked up crumbs from me), she would be a sort of little saint—a character not often seen in these heathenish times, especially amongst straight, shapely,

well-grown people, who are seldom very good, I think
—your Majesty, of course, excepted.

THE EMPEROR.

And the Princess ?

SMALL WISE MAN.

Well, the Princess is a woman who has her temper
from the dark angels, and her other qualities from
the bright ones ; and there are battles sometimes.

THE EMPEROR.

And both girls love the self-same man ?

SMALL WISE MAN.

Well, this is not a thing that often happens,
perhaps, to certain potent personages ; but there
are people blessed with infirmities, who know what
it is to be loved by more than one woman at a time.
The kind creatures begin with pity, proceed to
admiration, and then the step is not so far off to
love.

THE EMPEROR.

Ah ! ‘pity kin to love,’ the ancient saying—

Far off that kith, I ween.—These two were rivals :

And now they are friends, closely conjoined to gain
My pardon for the Count—it's scarcely probable.

SMALL WISE MAN.

We are wise, my liege, both you and I, in our several ways; but we have many a school to go through before we shall begin to understand anything about that perplexity of perplexities, those strange mysterious creatures, called women. They were given to men, as I guess, for an almost insoluble problem, in order that a man who has anything to do with them should never be idle.

THE EMPEROR (*to the Officer*).

Bring here the page—the true page this time,
sirrah.

No more of small wise men. (*Exit OFFICER.*)

Dwarf, you are wise,
And as much truth as such a mocking nature
Can tell, you've told to us. We shall reward you.
(*Aside*). We still must test them closer.

SMALL WISE MAN.

Oh no, no, no, please your Majesty; truth is never paid for. A large price is always given by princes,

and by most men, for the other thing. Pray, don't reward me: my truths will turn to lies if you sprinkle any gold dust on their tails.

[*The Czar laughs and returns to his chair.*

(*Enter PRINCESS with the Officer. Exit OFFICER.*)

THE EMPEROR (*rising to receive the PRINCESS*).

St. George ! I would I were a simple Count,
And not the Czar, to be so strangely loved
By two fair girls, that one forgives the truant,
And each forgives the other for her love.
They say we monarchs are not favoured much
With truth from those who flock about our thrones.
'Tis not in nature, and I'm played upon
By both of you. (*Walks about disturbedly.*)
You know my friendship for the man, and seek
To dupe me. Princess, will you marry him?—
He loves you not.—Forget your father's wrong?
He loves you not,—and thus enable me
To pardon. You (*to OULITA*) will never see him
more.

OULITA.

But once, and only to convince the Count
That never more we meet—(*aside*) at least in this
world.

THE EMPEROR (*to the PRINCESS*).

And you will marry him ?

PRINCESS.

I will, nor seek

His love, nor ask him to live with me.

THE EMPEROR.

It shall be done, nor all the spawn of Grübners,
Bred in dark pools, and sent on the earth to plague
Us monarchs, shall compel me to recall
My plighted word to you—(*Signs a paper.*)

Here is an order.

Haste forward on Siberia's road. The Count
Is gone already. Grübner tarries not
In his good works. To such diplomatists
It scarcely needs be said the Count is proud,
And must be dealt with cunningly—
And tenderly : though liberty be dear
To such a man, he'll hardly pay the price
Of feigning love for it, or make a marriage
Serve as a means of safety : he'll not do it—
I have but little hope ; but God be with you.

[*Exeunt omnes.*]

SCENE IV.

A Village on the road to Siberia.

Enter ERMOLAÏ. He brings out a seat from the post-house, and places it under a tree. In the distance is heard the ‘ Song of the Exiles.’

Farewell to the mothers who bore us,

Farewell to the huts where as children we grew,

Farewell to the trees that hung o’er us,

*The trees and the streams that from boyhood we
knew;*

Farewell to our friends, farewell to our foes,

For neither friend nor foe an exile knows.

Sing no more, never more,

Sing never, never more.

[Enter slowly, guarded by Cossacks, the Exiles for Siberia—the COUNT among them. ERMOLAÏ leads him to the seat, and gives him wine. The others lie down on the ground.]

ERMOLAÏ.

I’m sent to watch you. Oh, what bitter thoughts

Are mine, dear Lord ! I should have warned you
more.

Amazed by your intelligence and skill,
I let myself believe we were a match
For Grübner ; now too late I see——

COUNT.

Pooh ! man,

Let not regret and prudent afterthoughts,
The weak man's winter wisdom, Ermolai,
That blooms too late, disturb your serious mind,
For I regret it not. Where's she ?—Oulita ?
Hast heard of her ?

ERMOLAI.

Back to her home she went. Further I know not.

COUNT.

Her home ! The Prince's !

ERMOLAI.

We might escape this throng ;
But could we hope to gain the frontier ?

COUNT.

No.

It must be borne.

*(Enter VASILI ANDROVITCH, accompanied by
some troopers.)*

VASILI.

I turned a little from my way, Sir Count,
To thank you for your hospitality,

*(Enter OULITA, the PRINCESS veiled, and
the SMALL WISE MAN. They look
anxiously amongst the prisoners; at last
discern the COUNT, to whom OULITA
advances.)*

Somewhat enforced, no doubt, but still most liberal.

It seems that things are changed since last we met.

Becoming garments, these—choice company,

(Pointing to the other exiles)

To journey with a magnate of the Empire.

The honest ways are driest—so the copy-books,

When I was young, declared—and you here, insolent!

(Seizes hold of OULITA.)

COUNT.

Away, man! else I shall regret I spared you.

'Twas a mistake, I see.

[The PRINCESS comes forward and seizes

VASILI ANDROVITCH by the arm.

PRINCESS.

You wretch, be still,
Or you shall join this company yourself.
The fallen majesty of greatness to insult
Is not for slaves like you ; and no one else
Would have the heart to do it.

[VASILI ANDROVITCH *walks aside.*

COUNT.

Dearest Oulita ! thou here ?
Why Heaven is most benign : the clouds break up,
The dear bright sky is seen again, for thou
Art here—a joy beyond my utmost hope.
A glad procession of one's friends it is,
And not a march into Siberia.
But all events are made to seem much worse
By the o'erfearing mind than in reality
They are. Hideous the stormy night appears
To those within, who gather round the fire,
Well-housed, who think they hear, not the mere
elements,
But strange malignant beings dash against
The rattling casements,—creatures of the storm.
Great pity for the traveller rises in the hearts
Of the home group that listens, shrinking fearfully

At thought of others' sufferings. He, meanwhile,
The pitied man, remarks, 'It rains apace,'
And breasts the storm, enjoying its fierce clamour.

OULITA.

I do rejoice, my Lord, to see how brave
A heart you bear, not daunted——

COUNT.

Daunted! Not I.

Walk calmly up to any dreaded evil,
And stare it in the face, it dwarfs itself
As you advance, and crouches like a beast
Before the godlike eye of fearless man.

[*He seeks to embrace her.*]

OULITA.

Enough of that, my Lord, we are observed
By some you reckon not of.

COUNT (*aside*).

The girl is cold.

There's some design. It needed only this
To make the woe complete.

OULITA.

I've seen the Czar.

COUNT.

A noble personage!

OULITA.

And a true friend

Of yours.

COUNT.

Perhaps.

OULITA.

He longs to have you back.

COUNT.

Indeed! (*Sits down.*) Pardon: the march was
difficult

To-day.

OULITA.

Dear Edgar, listen to me.

COUNT.

I' faith, girl,

Society is not so brilliant here

That one despises any talk. Proceed.

OULITA.

On one condition you receive your pardon—

One that allows the Czar to step beyond

The bounds of justice,—so he said.

COUNT.

Pray, name it.

OULITA.

Your tone is scornful ; but, indeed, the Czar
Means righteously. You have to wed the Princess,
Her father's ire will be assuaged, none know
In Petersburg that you are gone.—The scandal
Sinks in the ground, indeed is wholly lost
Amidst your coming greatness, for the embassy
To England follows : all is gained, the Princess,
Who loves you much, consents, nor asks your love
Again. And I, if ever you have loved me,
Implore upon my knees this one last favour,
Already overcome with gratitude,—
This one last boon, the largest you could grant me.
Speak, Edgar.

COUNT.

Do not kneel to me, 'tis fruitless.

(She rises.)

They must have treated you with subtle cruelty
Ere they had bent your noble spirit thus.
The Princess, then——

OULITA.

I overcame her hate
With love, through love ; we now are fond as sisters.

COUNT.

Ha ! and you've laid this plot for me. My thoughts
Have not been idle through this toilsome march.
Of something one must think, it soothes the toil.
And on my right hand and my left, grave company,
Walked many of my sins (we men are not
As good as you are), and a hideous troop
They were ; but not amongst them all, Oulita,
Was one, I think, of much deliberate baseness,
One that the long line of my ancestors
Would shiver as they saw it—sins of passion,
Many—crimes if you like,—of baseness none.
I would not have another pleasant march
With any sin of this sort to walk by me—
Misery, but not dishonour.

OULITA.

Who is wronged by such—
But stay ! There's one who's wiser far than I am,
A noble soul in a misshapen body.
But you'll not scorn him, sir. He may prevail
Where I cannot.

[OULITA goes to the back of the stage for the
SMALL WISE MAN.]

COUNT.

'Tis there, and there alone,
They fail egregiously. Women know nought
Of justice, or of what we men call honour.
We must be what we are, and they what they are.

[*OULITA returns with the SMALL
WISE MAN.*

My little friend, you see our grandeur much
Diminished. This fond girl, with small respect
For what is just, would have our honour lessened,
Would have us do that which for untold worlds
She would not do herself. Speak on, Oulita.

OULITA (turning to SMALL WISE MAN).

I said but what I've oft rehearsed with you.
I urged a marriage which would save himself,
Would bless his country, would rejoice his Czar
(The holiest balm for my poor wounded soul),
Would thwart his enemies, delight his friends,
Enchant a woman we have injured much—
And who is wronged, I ask, by such a marriage?

COUNT.

Only my honour and—your own. But, dearest,
Your great devotion to my unworthy self
Merits a grave response. Oulita, listen.

A Frenchman, whom I knew, came once to Russia,
Leaving behind a girl whose love he'd won,
And whom he wholly loved ; he worked and toiled,
And putting all his gains in one great pearl,
Proceeded to the frontier. The Police
Found out this pearl; they said—what will they
not ?

'Twas stolen. Now the Chief of the Police
Had a most beauteous daughter ; but her looks—
For men are so perverse in these things—scared
My friend, the Frenchman, and her lustrous eyes
Brought a cold feeling o'er his heart, whene'er
He looked at them. The girl was not averse
From him, but Frenchmen always are loved, so
They tell you. Briefly, for, at best, it is
A wretched tale : the Frenchman married her—
The one he did not love,—but saved his pearl.
Now, could you love that Frenchman ? say, Oulita.
I need not tell to one of your sagacity
The Frenchman is a fable.

OULITA.

These pretty fables
Are mostly misapplied ; no one sad story
Is really very like another.

(*Turning to SMALL WISE MAN.*)

You say nothing?

SMALL WISE MAN (*turning away*).

The Count is wholly right. I can say nothing,
For the first time no folly comes to me,
My wit is withered. (*He walks away.*)

COUNT.

‘No sad tale,’ you say,
‘Is really very like another.’ There spoke out
My fair philosopher, who in the wood
Engaged my heart by gentle subtle words
Above the range of ordinary women.
No more of this. I am resolved. We trifle
In such discourse; but listen, let my words
Burn into your heart, Oulita, and abide there.
The wheel turns round, endurance mostly conquers.
A man who has some force is sometimes wanted.
I shall return—perhaps; and then I claim you.
If not, I have a loving memory always by me,
Something to think of when I sit beside
My hut, amidst the unheeded falling snow,
Of evenings, when my sorry work is done.
Better so sit, so thinking, than in palaces—

A thought of inextinguishable baseness
Fast clinging round the soul,—drink merrily
With princes, or partake their cares—perhaps,
Their empires guide—that thought still clinging to
you,
And making all your purple pageantry
A mere concealment of the horsehair robe,
Such as some royal devotee has worn
Beneath the imperial garments, studded o'er
With massy gold : and, as the courtiers smile,
And chant his victories, the cruel robe
Gnaws into him, the while he graceful bows
In high acknowledgment of glozing words—
No robe of penitence, but of sublime remorse.
I am resolved. Now let us talk of love.
We lose the precious minutes, dearest, waste them.
Hast often thought of me ?

OULITA (*aside*).

And I, too, am resolved. (*Aloud*) Once only,
Edgar.

But that thought lasted long.

(*She looks at him for a moment or two,
then puts her arm round his neck,
and embraces him fondly.*)

Now nothing more but death shall touch

These lips. *(Aloud and smilingly)*

And if the French girl died, the one he left—

To save his pearl he might have married then

The one whose looks the much misjudging man

Did not approve, but who loved him, and whom,

With her last breath Oulita begged his love for——

*(She steps back hastily from him a few
paces, applies the poison to her lips,
and falls down.)*

The shadows come. Hark, Edgar !

(He kneels by her side.)

I am dying,

Dying for thee. Do not refuse the sacrifice,

But let my spirit, soothed by thy renown

And honour, float o'er thee and her,

*(The PRINCESS has advanced. OULITA
joins their hands.)*

Entranced

In joy, and nothing grudging, see thee crowned

By gladsome nations as their saviour statesman,

And not a useless exile. No, touch not ;

Bear him away—away,—there's death upon

These lips. Why stare ye so? The clouds are
nearer—

The haze enfolds us—oh, those happy days !

My mother, yes, I come. *(She dies.)*

COUNT.

Oh Heaven, All-merciful, lay not to her charge

This sin : this most unselfish self-destruction,

(Turns to the body of OULITA.)

Useless, thrice useless sacrifice ! For me,

For most unworthy me, to throw away

Thy royal gift of life ! I would live on

If only that there may be time to mourn thee.

SMALL WISE MAN.

And this is all my doing ; mine, I say.

Strike me : 'twas I who culled the accursed herbs

That withered up her sweetness. Life's a jest,

The world, a crazy gibing thing, deformed,

Like me,—

That mocks, and mocks, and is not paid for mocking,

Like me. But whom to speak to now that thou

Art gone !

*(He sits down by the body, and covers
his face with his hands.)*

[The exiles resume their song.]

COUNT.

Bury her here, and mark the place, good Ermaloï,

'Tis the last service that I ask of you.

Madam (*to the PRINCESS*), we both have lost our
truest friend.

Let this bond be between us ; now, farewell.

I love you for your tenderness to her,

But this seared heart to any other woman

'Twere base beyond the ample privilege

For baseness which belongs to men, to offer.

I go to bear an exile not unjust ;

I go to bear it patiently.

[*He returns and kisses OULITA'S face,
and then resumes his march. The
song of the exiles is heard in the
distance. The curtain falls.*

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